

SEEKING A COUNTRY

THOS. F. LOCKYER

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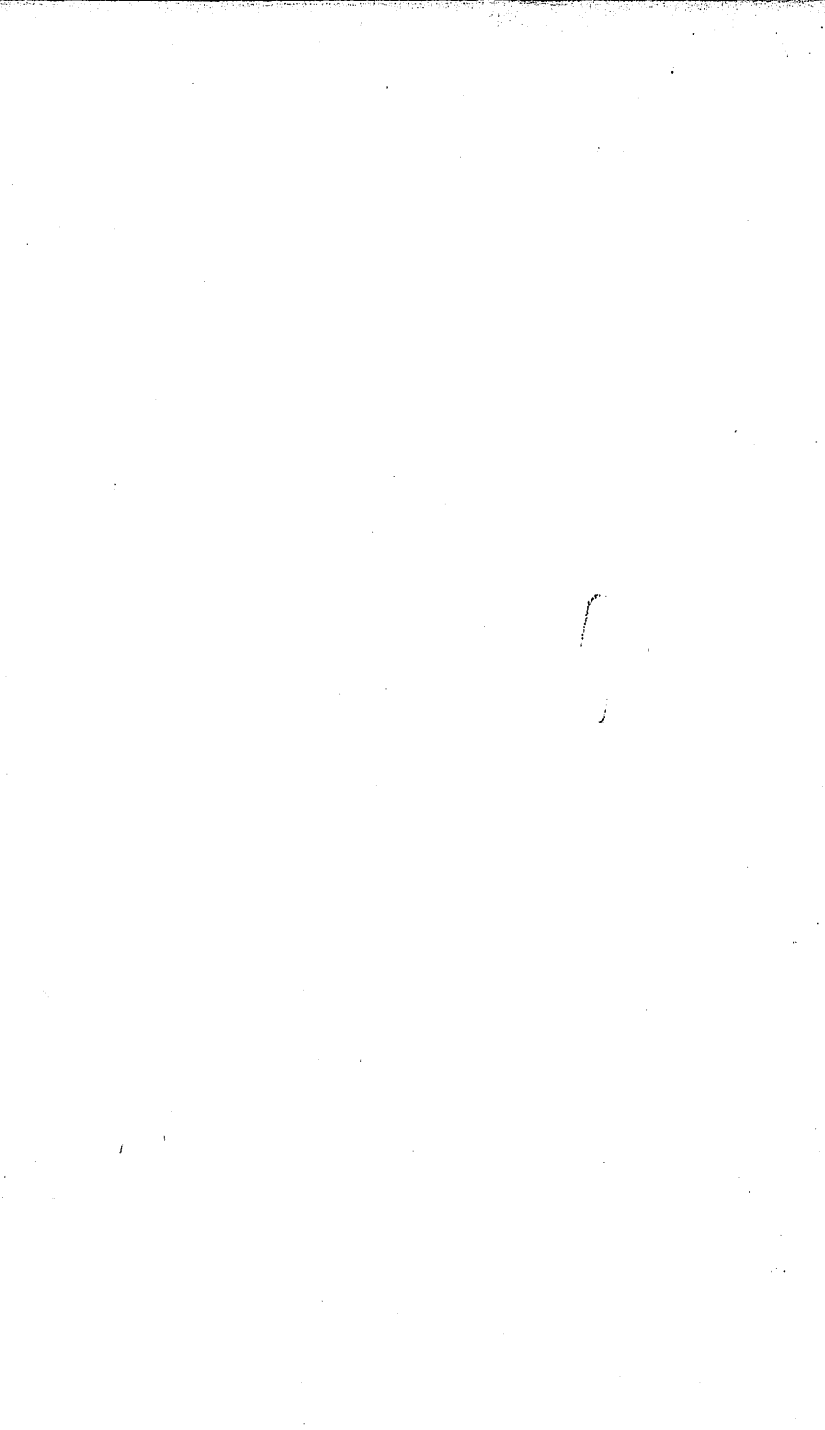
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SEEKING A COUNTRY



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BY

THOS. F. LOCKYER, B.A.

AUTHOR OF

"THE EVANGELICAL SUCCESSION; OR, THE SPIRITUAL LINEAGE OF THE
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SEEKING A COUNTRY

"For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own."—HEB. xi. 14.

WHAT a wonderful history is rehearsed in this chapter! the history of the men of faith. They move before us, as in solemn procession, from the elders of our race, the firstborn of the world, on through all the strange vicissitudes of the early eras, through the nearer years of the patriarchs of Canaan; and then through the period of bondage out of which a nation was born, through its wilderness wanderings, its first heroic achievements, its fluctuations of obedience and apostasy; on to the days of decline, of judgment, of catastrophe. Never were there wanting witnesses for God: men of like passions, of like infirmities, with the rest, but who, while the world alternately coaxed and withstood them, held fast to their faith in "things not seen," and, though with many failures on the part of some of their number, yet held on their way, waxing stronger and stronger.

Not only have these men a history, moving onward in bright succession through the sombre ages of "the course of this world," and, by their integrity of purpose and of deed, imparting something of worth and of permanence to the world's own history; but within the history of the men of faith there is a history of faith itself, the spiritual principle that

sustained them developing its potency and its significance as the generations passed—on towards that fulness of time in which it was to centre itself in a manifested Saviour, and thus to become the vital force of the world's new birth.

But this leads us to notice that the unseen realities of which faith lays hold, and by the power of which it overcomes the world, have likewise their history. That is, they are not stagnant realities, affording firm hold to the men of faith by their mighty inertia. They are rather the very dynamics of the universe; they are ever working out results; and by the resistless momentum of their progress they carry forward to their goal those that lay hold of them by faith. In fact, they are the elemental forces that work out the

one far-off Divine event
To which the whole creation moves;

they are the powers of the kingdom of heaven; they are the very activities of the Living God. To be apart from them is death; to ally ourselves with them is to "lay hold on the life which is life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 19).

Thus the men of faith are men of hope; they have something to live for; their faces are towards the dawn; they look for and earnestly desire "the coming of the day of God" (2 Pet. iii. 12). Or, as we read at the beginning of the chapter, "Faith is assurance of things hoped for," just because it is "a conviction of things not seen" (ver. 1).

I.

Let us look, for our present purpose, at three pictures that start before the mind's eye as we read this history of the men of faith and hope—the men

who "make it manifest that they are seeking after a country."

Look first at the great Chaldean pilgrim, moving so serenely and strongly amid the pride and puerilities of that old-world civilization of the Euphrates. It is a masterful empire to which he belongs; it has sent out its conquering armies far and wide; it has brought many lands and peoples beneath its overlordship. But it is wholly given to idolatry; and it has "changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Rom. i. 23). Even in their less grotesque and debasing beliefs, and as venerating the hosts of heaven, the people nevertheless worship and serve "the creature rather than the Creator." But, in the midst of these superstitions, we behold Abraham a believer in the one true and living God, worshipping and serving Him alone. Some secret voice he has heard, which the others are too deaf to hear; some heavenly vision has dawned upon his soul, that makes the glory of sun, moon, and stars seem poor. And at last the heavenly vision lures him on a holy quest, and the voice says, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee . . . and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii. 1, 3). So Abraham goes on his way, God's pilgrim, "seeking after a country," with hope radiant on his brow, and faith stirring strongly in his heart. He comes to Haran, and sojourns there; but soon the vision and the voice constrain him to renew the quest; until at length he comes to Canaan—the tributary West-land of the Babylonian empire—and receives the assurance, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." This, then, is the land of promise, the

better country; and here Abraham dwells, wandering to and fro, but ever cherishing his high hopes, and looking for the fulfilment of the promise.

But let us behold another picture. Many years have passed, and we see Abraham's grandson, the crafty, plotting, over-reaching Jacob, a fugitive from home, a banished man, escaping, for his very life, from the wrath of the injured Esau. He is hasting to the East, and on about the fourth night of his solitary journeying he lies down in a lonely place to sleep, with his head on a pillow of stone, and above him only the watching and reproachful sky. How the guilty memories of the past throng through his mind! In spite of himself, he lives it all over again, that history of fraud and wrong; and he feels himself to be an outcast alike from God and man. So he falls asleep, and the thoughts of his waking moments pass into the troubled imaginings of his dreams. All at once there is a change. He dreams a dream of peace, a dream of hope. There is a broad stairway builded up between earth and heaven, whereon God's shining ones pass to and fro; and where the ladder loses itself in the light of heaven he beholds the glory of God, and the voice speaks which he dreads to hear. But lo, it speaks in blessing, and the words are words of gracious promise: "I am Jehovah, the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac. The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee whithersoever thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of" (Gen. xxviii. 13, 15). Thus Jacob goes on his journey to the far-off land, and lives through the long years of banishment, sustained by a mighty hope.

See now a third picture. Once more long years have passed. We are in the wilderness country of Horeb. A shepherd is watching his flock, and, as he gazes dreamily beyond them towards the desert, his attention is arrested by a strange sight—a bush that burns with unconsuming fire. He looks, and wonders; and God speaks to him out of the midst of the bush, saying, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry; and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. And I will send thee, that thou mayest bring forth My people out of Egypt" (Exod. iii. 7, 8, 10). So Moses becomes the great deliverer and leader of his people, from henceforth living for this alone, that he may bring them to the goodly land, the better country, the inheritance promised to their fathers.

Thus, then, were Abraham, Jacob, Moses men of hope; they lived for a better future; they made it manifest that they were seeking after a country.

But now let us take three other pictures, suggested by the same history, and place them alongside these pictures of hope and promise.

Take first that strange pathetic picture of the bargaining of Abraham with the children of Heth. He is bereft with a great and sore bereavement. Sarah, the comrade of his journeyings, and the partner of his hope, has died. "And Abraham rose up from before his dead, and spake unto the children of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight" (Gen. xxiii. 3, 4). Then follows the ceremonious negotiation for the cave of Ephron the Hittite; and when, with the fine and

stately courtesy that marks their manner, they have come to terms, the price is paid in the presence of many witnesses, and the contract for the purchase of the burying-place is complete. "So the field of Ephron, which was in Machpelah, which was before Mamre, the field, and the cave which was therein, and all the trees that were in the field, that were in all the border thereof round about, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth": and this was all that Abraham ever possessed of the country of which God had said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land." Through all his days, he was "a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own, dwelling in tents, with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise."

This brings us to another picture. We are once more on the confines of Egypt. There comes forth, in solemn march and slow, a vast and various procession. The Viceroy of the empire is there, with all the pomp and circumstance of woe; courtiers, princes, chiefs take part, with stately retinue; the great concourse of the kinsmen of Joseph swell the procession; and for escort there are chariots and horsemen of Egypt's chivalry. Surely scarce ever was such a funeral march in the history of the world. Thus wending their way through the wilderness, at length they come to the borders of Canaan, "and there they lamented with a very great and sore lamentation . . . seven days" (Gen. l. 10). Then the sons of Jacob passed over Jordan, carrying the embalmed body of the dead patriarch, "and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah": and this was almost all that Jacob ever knew of a possession in the land of promise, the country of his inheritance.

And yet once more. We are with the Israelites

over against Jericho. Their wanderings at last are ended, and they are about to pass over and possess the land. Yes, that which their grand, heroic leader has lived for, toiled for, almost died for, is now accomplished: he has brought them through the wilderness; he has prepared them for the work and warfare that await them; he has all but led them into the land of promise. But even now, on the very threshold of the fulfilment of all his hope, the voice says to him, "Go, get thee up, and die"; and, in the presence of the weeping people, he goes up to the top of Pisgah, beholds the goodly land, and dies "there in the land of Moab, according to the word of Jehovah" (Deut. xxxiv. 5). He saw it with his eyes, but he might not go over thither. Thus were his hopes seemingly contradicted, and, like Abraham and Jacob, he died, "not having received the promises."

II.

What is the meaning of these seeming contradictions? God, the Covenant God, had promised; why did He not perform? Was this an intended mockery of their hopes, that these men should be led to seek a country, and that it should thus be withheld from their possession?

No, this cannot be. Even were the mystery for the present insoluble, we must leave it, knowing that the real significance of God's doings would at last be His vindication. It is not at all certain, however, that even the seeming contradiction is as great as at first sight we think. And it will be well for us to look into the matter more closely, before thus concluding.

But let us remind ourselves, at this stage, that the experience of Abraham, Jacob, and Moses was by no

means exceptional. Nay rather, it was representative—although on a large scale, and more conspicuously than in most cases—of a very general experience in the history of human lives. Hope shines before men, and lures them on; they have their dreams of blessing, their visions of coming good; the fair ideals of life seem to pledge heaven itself to their fulfilment. Alas, how often these hopes fail of realization; how the visions pale, and the dreams die away; how the pledges of life seem to be broken, and life itself is left poor, disappointed, empty! The promised inheritance is not possessed.

Look at that company of people on Plymouth Rock, just landed from their little bark—voluntary exiles from their fatherland, for faith and freedom. They will be the makers of a new world, in which the abuses and tyrannies from which they flee shall find no place. They are entering upon a veritable Land of Promise—a land of peace and liberty. Well may their hearts beat high with hope, and their voices thrill with the glad excitement of the hour, as they sing their doxology to Heaven.

And the stars heard, and the sea;
And the sounding aisles of the dim woods rang
To the anthem of the free.

But though it is mostly true, as the poet goes on to tell, that—

They have left unstain'd what there they found—
Freedom to worship God;

yet America is not, and has never been, the 'Better Land' of fulfilled ideals. There also many of the abuses of former times have been reproduced; there tyranny has again reared its head, and persecution has raged, and greed has striven for the mastery.

Rather more than a hundred years ago, a neighbouring country to our own was in the throes of a revolution which was to usher in a new era, and "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" was the watchword of a coming Golden Age. Old despotisms were overthrown, and the abused privileges of centuries were uprooted. Sympathetic onlookers, in this and in other lands, participated in the hopes of a struggling nation. But what followed the first dawn of promise? A reign of terror, and "the red fool-fury of the Seine." Nor to this day, with all its gaiety and generous charm, is "La Belle France" a paradise.

Is not the same thing true of individual life? What mean the glowing visions of youth, as compared with the dull, gray skies of later years? Where is the fulfilment of many of the dreams of bliss with which the young traveller beguiles his way? Well is our human life pictured forth in Wordsworth's great ode. He tells us how

Heaven lies about us in our infancy—

the days of early childhood, bathed in all the golden splendours of the sunrise. Then, as the pilgrim goes on his journey from the dawn,

Shades of the prison-house begin to close

Upon the growing boy;

But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,

He sees it in his joy.

Still the pilgrimage goes on, and the youth, with his face westwards, passes farther into the shadows, and the light loses yet more of its early prodigality of glory. Nevertheless, he is yet a child of light; he still wears the aureole of the morning;

And by the vision splendid

Is on his way attended.

But what is too often the sequel of this history of hope and promise? what becomes, at length, of the lingering wizardry of the day-dawn? where is the glory of the morning?

At length the man perceives it die away,
And fade into the light of common day.

Yes, common enough is the life often suffered to become; we talk, as though it were a matter of course, of our disillusionment; we acquiesce, if not contentedly, yet with resignation, in the failure of our hopes, the shattering of our dreams, the non-fulfilment of life's ideals.

So that human life, in its more general experiences, as well as history, in its more special episodes and movements, corresponds but too closely with the pictures of alternate hope and failure, promise and disappointment, with which we are confronted in these stories of the men of faith.

III.

But let us now examine their history more closely. It must surely strike us that, at least in this great paean of faith, there is not even an undertone of lamentation or regret, as in sympathy with any suggested failure of the lives which it portrays. On the contrary, it is one sustained jubilation of victory, in which the note of triumph never falters.

Who could suppose, in reading this record, that Abraham was a disappointed man? We see him, indeed, "a sojourner in the land of promise, as in a land not his own"; very likely marvelling at first (though this is not told) that no sign is given of God's will concerning the fulfilment of the promise. Not only, however, does he refrain from any attempt

to turn his growing power and influence to account, so as to possess himself of walled cities and broad lands; but, as the history in Genesis makes plain, he steadfastly refused to avail himself of opportunities of aggrandisement that fortune put in his way, choosing always to obey the better instincts of generosity and magnanimity, and thus to show his unfaltering faith in the unknown purposes of God. The years passed, and the fulfilment of the promise, as he had once understood it, was still afar. But instead of carrying himself as a disappointed, crushed, and broken man, Abraham moves as a very prince of God among the people of the land, until, in the hour of his great bereavement, when circumstances conspire to emphasise his non-possession of the inheritance, he rises to the full stature of his faith and hope. Has he not learned a secret, as the years have passed? Does he not find that God's promise has been fulfilling itself all the time? Are not the seeming failures of fulfilment contributory to the true fulfilment? For what was the promise? that Abraham should become lord of acres, ruler of cities, master of men? So at first he may have interpreted its meaning. "Unto thee will I give this land": for its money's worth? its flocks and herds? its merchandise? or as the massing-place of mighty clans? Was it a promise of wealth, of chieftainship, of power among the nations? No, surely these are not God's best gifts for His chosen ones. He had said, "I will bless thee . . . and be thou a blessing . . . and in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. xii. 2, 3). The land, then, should be his own, just in proportion as it helped to work out for Abraham this blessing—the blessing of faith. "So then they that are of faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham" (Gal. iii. 9). If this work was

wrought, God's purpose was accomplished; and if the tent-life in Canaan, with its vicissitudes, and even with its disappointment and perplexity, helped eventually to train Abraham to his perfect faith, then that land, as the sphere of such training, was far more truly his own than had he been undisputed over-lord of the tribes, and master of its hills and plains. Yes, he learned the secret. God was purposely loosening his tenure of things temporal, that he might have firm hold on things eternal. He was finding out the vanity of the earthly inheritance, that he might become possessed of the heavenly. And at last he realizes his spiritual citizenship; he lives and moves among the tribes as one whose better interests are elsewhere; the far-stretching land of an unseen kingdom is yielding him its enfranchisement, and opening all its fair promise to his faith and hope. He possesses much already, and looks for the fuller fruition hereafter: looks "for the city which hath the foundations, whose Builder and Maker is God." He still seeks a country—a country fairer than dreams, and brighter than day.

So was it, in measure, with Jacob, though Jacob never had the native princeliness of spiritual disposition that marked out the great Chaldean for his leadership of the faithful, and frank intimacy with God. Jacob must fight long and hard, with adverse circumstance, because with a perverse self. His very tribulation was his redemption. As by fire must the baser admixture be purged away. For him there is the promise; for him likewise the spiritual fulfilment. But he learns the full secret only as with his last breath. Then, when the things which once he had coveted were still withheld, and to him, an alien in a strange land, his Canaan was more than ever a distant dream, there came at last the full vision, as

he told of "the God who hath fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel who hath redeemed me from all evil" (Gen. xlviii. 15, 16); and Jacob passed from this chequered shadow-life to greet the breaking of the day.

As for Moses, that man of noblest make, the pure gold of whose nature was wrought, by much discipline, into the very finest workmanship of God; whose aims and desires, all through, were spiritual, and whose very failures were the defects of his spiritual qualities: he had been shown "the pattern in the mount," and had long learned that life here has any worth only as it is a transcript of the unseen, the divinely real and true. And when at last he stood on Pisgah, and saw the country, and was reminded that the first look should be the only one; then, though doubtless his heart sank, to think that he might not consummate his leadership of the people by himself bringing them in to their inheritance, yet only for a moment would there be this darkening of his soul. As he took the one long, lingering look at that goodly land, it brightened into a parable of the true Land of Promise, the full fruition of which was now so near. Then, as by the kiss of God, his eyes were closed upon the earthly Canaan, and immediately his loss was gain, the transient penalty was transmuted into permanent reward, as, not tasting death, he beheld and possessed his own true better country.

Thus, for all these believers of the elder days, the promise spoke in parables; and though, for some few fleeting generations, there was a sort of literal fulfilment to the Hebrews of the promise made to their fathers, yet for them its mystic meaning was intended to be of the first importance, and, just because they failed thus to understand God's cove-

nant, the country that was meant for their blessing became their chastisement, and at last cast them out into banishment.

Must we not similarly understand the early hopes, the visions, the ideals of each individual life, as life is lived to-day? They are virtual promises of God to those who are called to set forth on life's pilgrimage. They are promises of blessing, which we so easily interpret as promises of bliss. That is, we understand their language as telling of earthly joy, whereas, had we but ears to hear, they would speak rather of the heavenly. They would lure us on a quest of the chief good, while we content ourselves with seeking what is partial, imperfect, and only suggestive of something other, better, diviner—or, if we persist in following it for itself alone, alluring, only to deceive. Let us, on the other hand, spell out the hidden prophecy of these hopes, and they but shine the brighter with the failure and frustration of their earthly and temporary significance—yes, brighter and brighter to the perfect day. And in turn, to those that grasp the spiritual, the eternal purport of life's visions, there shall be the eventual fulfilment of all promise, the fruition of all good.

In conclusion, there is an expression, belonging to the revised rendering of our text, in itself very striking, and lighting up, as with one swift flash, the whole subject which we have had under consideration. "They that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after *a country of their own*." It is customary for those who speak the language of the world to call houses, and lands, and goods their own; to call silver and gold their own: but is it true? That which, in the strict sense, is our very own, is something which our souls possess, and in which they find congenial satisfaction; that which

is kindred to our true human affections and sympathies, which may become a very part of our soul's life. Is this the case with our possession of money, or of soil? Can these things become properly a part of us, or claim kinship with our deepest instincts, our dearest hopes? Our dear human friendships are our very own, in proportion as they themselves are instinct with spiritual meaning, and as they are hallowed by the Divine benediction. But acres of country, or hoarded pelf—never! Thus Abraham, Jacob, Moses came to see that Canaan, as so much mere territory, could never be “a country of their own”; that only as it pointed to the true inheritance, and prepared for its possession, was it in any sense their portion. But that which was their very own was the spiritual, the eternal—it was God, and all the riches of God's grace and heavenly benediction.

O joy of joys, there is an inheritance which, here and hereafter, our inmost souls may possess—the wealth of that kingdom which is truth, love, life for evermore! But first we must find in the King of the kingdom, the Lord of love, the Christ of our redemption—we must find in Him a portion, an inheritance, our very own; and He offers Himself, that we may thus enter into the most intimate fellowship of His grace. Having Him, we have all, here and hereafter; for so our own King shall bring us to our own country.

THE HOMEWARD WAY

"Set thy heart toward the highway."—JER. xxxi. 21.

THUS does the prophet, seeing from afar the way of return from captivity, beseech the banished people to seek after it with strong desire. It was the way home—home to their fatherland, home to God.

For ourselves that ancient history is a parable. We live in the land of banishment; but to us there is opened a way of return. Exiles from God, from the true commonwealth of souls, and from the heavenly kingdom and city, we hear the heralding of amnesty, the proclamation of freedom; and, with all barriers broken down, all restrictions removed, it is said to us, as with Divine entreaty, "Set thy heart toward the highway."

I.

In almost every country habitable by man there are roads and paths. These are among the first necessities, whether of civilized or of savage life. Main trunk roads, from city to city, from land to land; tracks in the wilderness, paths in the forest; even viewless ways on what is called the pathless deep—such thoroughfares are to be found the wide world over; and as means of intercourse, and modes of conveyance, increase with the growing complexity of modern life, so do roadways multiply. More-

over, as we become minutely familiar with any countryside, or even with populous towns, we find many byways of convenience, or of pastime and pleasure. Winding in and out amid rural scenery, or threading their way through parks and parterres, or again skirting and intersecting old and rambling gardens, they invite to gay festivity or leisurely delight.

So has the great realm of human life its broadways and its byways, its great beaten tracks and its obscurer paths, its roads where many travellers pass and its ways for ramblers here and there.

There is the great Broadway of the world's work and business. In every country work must be done, sometimes more strenuous, sometimes fitful or somnolent. But the material rewards of the world fall, sometimes indeed to the clever and crafty, but mostly to diligent, earnest workers. And thus we see a vast host pursuing its ceaseless way along the great beaten track of the world's business. This is a thoroughfare that is always open, always thronged. We behold eager wayfarers, men of enterprise, who push forward with restless haste; we see quieter travellers, whose look of strong resolve and purposeful energy, as they press on more steadily, foretokens at least equal progress; we note that would-be laggards are urged onward by the pressure of the crowds behind, and that some weaker ones are here and there thrust out of the line of march, to fall wearily by the roadside and die. But still the multitudes make their wayfaring along this road of the world's toil, as the claims of livelihood or the glittering crowns of ambition variously impel or incite the endless succession of the passing generations of men.

And there are the byways of pleasance, of indulgence, alas often of evil gratification, of sinful revelry. Sometimes sauntering singly in their pastime, sometimes in companionship; now content to while away a passing hour, and now bent on making amusement itself their business, as in madding crowd they feverishly consume their very life away with riot—such are the multitudinous travellers in these meandering bypaths of the world's pleasure.

But these wayfarers, whether in the broadway of business or in the byways of pleasure, what to them shall be the end, when travelling days are done? They are travelling nowhither! The journeyings are for their own sake, not for the sake of any goal to which the journeying leads. We are children of eternity, and yet we are content to be wayfarers of time, travelling only by roads that are restricted to these narrow boundaries of the fleeting years, that have no outgoing towards another clime, that return upon themselves, and repeat themselves, and, even when seeming most serious in their intention, do but mock our poor intelligence.

Look again at the broadway of the world's work. You see the passing crowd of to-day; but where are the crowds of the world's yesterday?

By the roadside fell and perished,
Weary with the march of life—

that is the history of all the wayfarers, whether they fall young and strong, in the mid-rush of work and striving, or in the feebleness of age. And those who saunter in byways of pleasantness? Even when that pleasantness is of the purest and best, yet these tempting bypaths cannot hold it long.

The path by which we twain did go,
Which led by tracts that pleased us well,
Thro' four sweet years arose and fell,
From flower to flower, from snow to snow :

And we with singing cheer'd the way,
And, crown'd with all the season lent,
From April on to April went,
And glad at heart from May to May.

And then, all at once,

There sat the Shadow fear'd of man ;
Who broke our fair companionship,

And bore thee where I could not see
Nor follow, tho' I walk in haste,
And think, that somewhere in the waste
The Shadow sits and waits for me.

Yes, these roads, so full of life's vigour, of life's gaiety, are nevertheless roadways of death. They engross our thought, they compel our activity; but they have nothing to offer of result. If we would but know it, they are aimless, as tracks for those who must go out into the unseen. Were there only a great viaduct beyond, bridging the empty space, and leading to some metropolis of sweet society and endless rest! But alas, though "there is a way which seemeth right unto a man," yet "the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. xiv. 12): the ways themselves, as ways more truly of death than of life, with all their show of vitality, are the end of the way! It leads to itself, it returns upon itself, it has no good beyond itself. And it is haunted, withal, by the spectres of unfulfilled obligations, of disregarded destinies, of a forgotten God.

II.

But what the world cannot provide for life's way-

farers is provided by Him who is the God of our life—a highway that will bring its wayfarers home. "For thus saith Jehovah, Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth: a great company shall they return hither. I will cause them to walk in a straight way, wherein they shall not stumble." And so is it said to us, as to Israel: "Set thy heart toward the highway."

Consider, first, what is said of the fencing of the way. We read, in the same verse, of waymarks. These were small rounded pillars, set at intervals along the course, and were a perpetual warning against wandering from the track. So is the great homeward way of God's pilgrims fenced along on either side with waymarks—God's commandments, written with His own finger as on pillars of stone, to warn us against wandering into the near, tempting regions of evil indulgence, of sinful gratification, or even of errant desire. "Thou shalt not"—this is the inscription confronting us, whenever we are enticed by the meretricious flatteries and falsenesses of sin, and would fain turn aside to hold parley with its suggestions. But these things to which we are tempted are the things because of which we have dwelt in the land of banishment; they are the things for which we have been chastised, and of which we were made ashamed; and in our contrition for them we came "with weeping, and with supplications," unto God. Yet how easily we forget—we forget the exceeding sinfulness of sin, its subtlety, its sophistry, its inward shamefulness; and we are ready, in these unguarded moments of its cajoling, to listen to the siren voice, were it not that those dread inscriptions on the waymarks of our pilgrimage, around which there still seem to linger the thunder-

ings and lightnings of Horeb, are ever saying, "Thou shalt not." Thus God's law becomes a sort of objective conscience, the letters of living flame, that leaped into burning at His touch, awaking, as by spiritual telegraphy, the sensitiveness of "the law written in their hearts" (Rom. ii. 15), until men feel the same words, ready to scathe and scar their very souls, unless they give heed, "Thou shalt not!"

Such are the precautions to ensure that this highway shall be a "way of holiness" (Isa. xxxv. 8). That is, while men refrain from forbidden things, according to the commandments, they are set free to devote themselves to the more positive fulfilment of God's holy will; and thus only are they in very truth God's people. To avoid the seductions lying along their line of march is one thing; but only as they press earnestly along the highway itself are they real wayfarers, true pilgrims of God. It is not possible to insist too strongly upon this distinction. Very mischievous is the merely negative presentment of a holy life; indeed, the commandments themselves may be mischievous, if we take them as purporting to set forth "the whole duty of man." But listen to words which the prophet has already been rehearsing: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee" (Jer. 3). What, then, is the impulse upon which these holy attractions play? what is the true and proper response to such love? "We love, because He first loved us" (1 John iv. 19). Yes, "Thou shalt love Jehovah thy God with all thy heart"—this is the one all-comprising positive law of our life towards God, the supreme commandment, as set forth to God's people of old, and as re-uttered in all its supremacy of claim by Jesus Christ (Deut. vi. 5; Matt. xxii. 37). Where this perfect love

inspires the heart, the life will be all devotion to God's will; and the very momentum of this holy living will carry God's wayfarers onward, in swift and gladsome progress, until they shall hardly notice the waymarks of the great prohibitions any longer, their whole soul burning with the desire "to be well-pleasing unto" God (2 Cor. v. 9). See that courier speeding on his mission. He has one thought, one aim, one desire—to discharge his allotted duty, to be true to his trust, to win the approval of the king. A king's courier! what has he to do with the beguilements on either side the way? He heeds them not; he knows them not. Let him become a loiterer; let him, for ever so little a while, grow unheeding of his business—ah, then he will be in peril; then the attractions of alien things may appeal to him not in vain. His safety from these temptations consists in his devotion to sacred claims. So are God's people free from the impertinences of sinful suggestion, in proportion as they are about His business; and they are even free from the law itself, as the law of stern forbidding, while they are yielding themselves, willingly and eagerly, to the sweet constraints of the imperial law of love.

Thus it is manifest that the way of holiness is for wayfarers whose pilgrimage must be accomplished, not by their own sheer strength of striving, but by the power of an enkindled inspiration, the inspiration of God's love; and therefore it must be the way of faith. What is faith, but the yielding to God's grace, the opening of the heart to His love, the surrender of the life to His charge and care? Faith discerns love, interprets love, receives love; and the love thus known, and felt, and possessed, wakes up our dormant love, ennobles our otherwise sordid nature, and transfigures all our life. He comes to

us; He calls us; His is the initial movement, the first advance. Love—sovereign, sweetest love—calls us by name, takes hold of us, seeks to possess us. So Jesus said to the disciples, “Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you” (John xv. 16). This is the election of grace: not any arbitrary determination of destiny, but the spontaneous movement of redeeming love towards sinful ones—a love that loves unbribed, unpersuaded, unsolicited; a love that loves freely, just because it is love, and, because it is God’s love, loves first. But this love, so sovereign, so sweet, may be refused. We may resist its claims; we may ignore its sacred attractions. Were it otherwise—were we so constituted that we must inevitably yield—then our seeming surrender would be but the response of a blind necessity, not the response of faith. “By grace are ye saved”: it is God’s great willingness that comes first, without which salvation would not be possible; “through faith”: it is man’s willingness that must meet God’s willingness,—or there could be no salvation worth the name (see Eph. ii. 8). The whole mission and ministry of Christ was God’s manifest movement of grace towards man; this was the purport of His gospel, as He preached it, and as it was made known by His messengers; and the ever-recurring summons and exhortation to believe was the constant reminder that the homeward way—the way to God and heaven—is pre-eminently a way of faith. So emphatic, indeed, was the insistence upon this all-essential condition, that, more than all else, it attracted the attention of men, and, in those early days of discipleship, “the Way” was spoken of by onlookers, as a manner of life novel and unique. This was because it was the way of faith—a religion, with a distinguishing principle so contrary to the

notions of men, so contradictory to their own devices and impulses, and therefore different from all other religions: faith working by love, purifying the heart, perfecting the holy life, but all this as beginning with the humble, grateful acceptance of God's free grace, God's great salvation. "That life which I now live, I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. ii. 20).

But does not this lead us to the further consideration that God Himself is the highway to which He brings His people, and along which He brings them home? Listen to what the prophet has been saying: "At that time, saith Jehovah, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people. . . . And My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, saith Jehovah" (vers. 1, 14). So does another prophet teach the people to say, "We will walk in the name of Jehovah our God for ever and ever" (Micah iv. 5); and in another place it is said, "I will strengthen them in Jehovah; and they shall walk up and down in His name" (Zech. x. 12). In the same sense Isaiah declares, though employing another and less familiar comparison, "There Jehovah will be with us in majesty, a place of broad rivers and streams" (Isa. xxxiii. 21). In God Himself we walk, and not merely in paths of His appointing. He is the very element of our life, the sustainment of our strength, and our portion for ever. Similarly does Christ say, "I am the Way" (John xiv. 6); and it is the very truth of truths, in the new covenant, that in Him we walk, and by Him we live. Whatever fulfilment we may find of life's real meaning, we find as we participate in Him; whatever inmost, deepest, truest satisfaction we experience, we experience through partaking of

Him. He is the Way, and the Truth, and the Life. Nor can the Christian say anything at once simpler and sublimer, of his life, than, "To me to live is Christ."

This means that the highway is a way of exceeding gladness. All through the prophecies of this chapter we hear, ever and again, a note of thrilling joy. "Sing with gladness for Jacob. . . . They shall come and sing in the height of Zion. . . . I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow." There is the first sweet revulsion of grateful joy, because of so great a redemption: "For I am a Father to Israel, and Ephraim is My firstborn"; "For Jehovah hath ransomed Jacob, and redeemed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he" (vers. 9, 11). And ever after there is the sense of that same sweet, yearning love (ver. 20), which makes all duty a delight, and turns darkness into day. Thus it is written, "The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad; and the desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. . . . And a highway shall be *there*." (See Isa. xxxv. 1, 2, 8.) So the pilgrims pass on, amid verdure, and blossoming, and song; and the very waymarks of the commandments are now hidden beneath masses of odorous bloom, and have become the nesting-places of singing birds.

In a service which Thy will appoints
There are no bonds for me;
For my inmost soul is taught the truth
That makes Thy children free;
And a life of self-renouncing love
Is a life of liberty.

"Set thy heart toward the highway"—the holy,

happy way ; the way of God's wondrous love, of the redeeming grace of the Son of God ; the way well trodden aforetime by myriads of saints that have now passed out of sight—yes, trodden by the dear feet of *our* saints, who now rest in God ; the old way, ever new ; “the way that leadeth unto life.” O, set *thy heart* towards it, for it means God, home, heaven !

A CITIZEN OF NO MEAN CITY

"But Paul said, I am . . . a citizen of no mean city."—
ACTS xxi. 39.

ONE wonders, in reading the account of the temple riot, whether the apostle was well advised in yielding to the representations of the elders at Jerusalem, and, for the sake of appearances, fulfilling a meaningless ceremony. "We have four men that have a vow on them: these take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges for them, that they may shave their heads; and all shall know that there is no truth in the things whereof they have been informed concerning thee; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, keeping the law. . . . Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them went into the temple, declaring the fulfilment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them" (vers. 23-26). It must surely have irked the great champion of spiritual liberty to have to fulfil this obsolescent rite for the sake of proving that he was not an opponent of old-established usages. But, under the strong pressure of the Church, and that he may serve the interests of peace, he yields, although such compliance, in this case, goes dangerously near to a compromise of principle. The results certainly did not justify the wisdom of his surrender to these considerations of expediency; for such

action on the part of the apostle proved to be the signal for the letting loose upon his head of all the accumulated fury of years of hatred, as, misrepresenting his attitude, "the Jews from Asia stirred up all the multitude" against him as a desecrator of the temple. The whole city was quickly in an uproar; the mobs surged angrily upon the scene of excitement; the apostle was violently dragged from the temple precincts; and, but for the prompt action of the Roman garrison, would have been straightway done to death. The chief captain, mistaking Paul for a criminal, has him bound and led away; but, on the stairway to the castle, the people still filling the air with their execrations, the apostle, thinking to allay their passions if only he may bear his testimony, asks permission of the officer to speak to the people. His mode of address reveals him as no ordinary man, and it is in answer to the chief captain's surprised exclamation that he declares himself, with some pardonable pride, as "a citizen of no mean city."

I.

In the midst of all the hubbub and peril of the hour, the man of Tarsus, on the crowded castle stairs, has a swift vision of his childhood's happy days. The soldiers, the mob, the holy place—all this scene fades, and he sees the bright, busy city on the Cydnus, in far-away Cilicia.

Tarsus was one of the celebrated cities of the ancient world. It had a long and chequered history, passing through bitter experiences, as the fortunes of war changed in the tumultuous times of the early Roman empire, but eventually gaining a privileged position as a free city. Its coins bore the proud

inscription of "Metropolis"; its own parliament made the laws under which the people lived; and, as chief rulers, eminent Tarsians directed its affairs.

The city was situated on both sides of the river Cydnus, whose cold, clear waters, fresh from the snows of the Taurus mountains, flowed on some ten or twelve miles farther to the sea. Here they spread out into a kind of lake, which afforded facilities for the construction of docks and the formation of a harbour. In the city itself there were wharves along the banks, which were thus the gathering-place for merchants and sailors from almost every clime.

There were public buildings of importance within the city boundaries: places of religious and civic assembly, courts of law, a large arena for the celebration of games, a theatre, and especially those seats of learning which made the University of Tarsus second to none in the Græco-Roman world. Outside the city were gardens and shady groves; not far from the northern entrance were the rocks over which the waters of the Cydnus fell in picturesque cascade; all around was a rich, fertile plain; on the lower slopes of the mountains the shepherds pitched their black goat-hair tents; and far above were the stately heights of Mount Taurus, whose snowy summits, at eventide, caught the rosy glow of the westering sun.

Through the Cilician gates, only a few miles away, passed the great road from the East into Asia Minor and the Western World, and thus Tarsus was almost at the confluence of two civilizations. By this contact with the intercourse of continents, as well as by affording harbourage and hospitality to the traffic of all the seas, the city was a home of well-informed, broad-minded people, among whom old barriers were

more readily broken down, and racial prejudices more easily died away. Moreover, the intellectual keenness of the inhabitants not only filled its own university with eager and successful students, but sent them abroad, in large numbers, both as students and as instructors, to other lands, so that even Rome itself was under great obligation to these teachers from the Cilician capital.

In such surroundings, and under such influences, Saul of Tarsus passed his childhood; and here, in later life, he spent several years of unrecorded evangelistic labours, and of preparation for his destined apostleship. For the special work awaiting him, these conditions were uniquely calculated to train and qualify one who was to be a chosen vessel, not only by the working of spiritual grace, but also by human endowment and equipment. Here began to be enkindled his passion for humanity; and here was fostered that love for human life, in its populous places of habitation, and in its larger movements of enterprise and interest, which afterwards made him instinctively shape his missionary campaigns so as to compass, with his apostolic activity, the strategic centres of the Roman world. We can picture the young child drinking in the ever varying influences of those associations of his early home; even as afterwards we can imagine him mingling with the crowds on the quays, observing the characteristics of the diverse nationalities represented there, and listening with interest to their various modes of speech: for, before that time arrived, he had received the great commission of apostleship to the Gentile world. In his knowledge and experience of men, he was a Gentile of the Gentiles.

But, besides this large equipment of experience, the apostle received a unique intellectual stimulus

and training at Tarsus. Himself naturally of a quick and eager temperament, he would be the more powerfully infected by the prevalent enthusiasm for studious pursuits; and during the later years in that city, whither perhaps he retired in large measure for that very purpose, he would make himself familiar with Greek culture, and would explore the riches of Greek literature. For, though by descent a Hebrew, and by call an apostle of salvation, it must be his business to neglect no knowledge, to omit no exercise of thought, which may bring him into closer touch with those whom he must by all means seek to save. And at Tarsus such knowledge is in the air. Some of its distinguished rulers have been philosophers, whose ethical and spiritual influence he would be the last to disesteem. It has had poets of its own, whose teaching he shall become apt to press into the service of the gospel.

Of such a city is he a citizen. He is one of the select minority who possess the full franchise of Tarsus. But, in a larger sense, he is citizen of that city, as inheriting all its prestige, as having imbibed its subtle influences by the myriad channels of the sensitive life of childhood's years, as having profited by all its multifarious experiences, and as having set himself deliberately to take advantage of its higher opportunities of research. "A citizen of no mean city": he needs only to mention the name of Tarsus in Cilicia, and Claudius Lysias will recognize at once that here is one who must presumably be treated with respect.

II.

But even as he speaks the words, and there flashes upon him this passing vision of the city on the

Cydnus, the apostle has other thoughts, and his words take on a larger than the immediate meaning.

If Tarsus was dear, as the home of his childhood, and the scene of long preparing for the apostleship, there was a city that was dearer—even the Jerusalem whose enraged mobs are just now seeking his life. Jerusalem indeed came second in his actual experience, but it came first in its influence upon his young soul; for, in the home at Tarsus, the father and the mother alike gave utmost heed that their child, in knowledge and sympathy, as in descent, should be a Hebrew of the Hebrews. The country of which they ever loved to tell was the Canaan of sacred story—the land promised to their fathers, and afterwards for a short while possessed. The heroes with whose names he was made familiar were those “who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens . . . of whom the world was not worthy” (Heb. xi. 33, 34, 38). And the city of which they spoke, with a tremor of utterance that betokened the deep feeling stirred by the very name—that city was Jerusalem, beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth.

Whatever education young Saul received at Tarsus, apart from home training and influence, would be given at some Hebrew school; for his father, a jealous Pharisee, would not allow the peril of contamination from Gentile instruction. And at an early age he was sent to the land of his fathers, the Holy City, to go through the full course of study at the University of Jerusalem, and obtain the proud qualification of Rabbi. Here there were two rival systems of teaching, the stricter that of Hillel, a

famous former doctor of the law, and the less orthodox that of his contemporary and competitor, Shammai. The one school was favoured by the party of the Pharisees; the other by their Sadducean rivals and opponents. It was a matter of course that the young Cilician scholar should be placed in the School of Hillel, then under the presidency of Hillel's celebrated grandson, Gamaliel. For the next quarter of a century the future apostle was saturated with the teachings of Jewish lore at its best and ripest, and his intellectual powers were trained and tempered by the subtle dialectics of the day, until he became at last a disputant of the rarest quality in all matters affecting their law.

But Gamaliel was a master of general literature, as well as an expert in Jewish theology; and, being moreover of liberal views and generous sympathies, he would give to his teaching such a breadth and tone as would harmonize well with that predisposition to appreciation of Greek culture which the early years at Tarsus had induced. So that, either already in Jerusalem, or afterwards at Tarsus, Saul probably himself acquired, as we have already seen, a knowledge of the literature of the larger world. Even so, however, these things were viewed as yet from the Hebrew standpoint, and all else was made tributary to his veneration for his faith, his ardent interest in the history of his people, and his intense devotion to a cause which he had always been taught to regard as uniquely sacred and Divine.

Did this glorying in the holy past become void, or suffer abatement, when afterwards he was an apostle of the Christian faith? Nay, rather, he then saw the history of his people, and the wondrous economy of the law and the prophets, in their true perspective, as preparing and foretokening that spiritual

redemption which had found fulfilment in the gospel committed to his charge. So whole-hearted and ardent is his attachment to his people, that he says, "I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh: who are Israelites; whose is the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and of whom is Christ as concerning the flesh, who is over all, God blessed for ever" (Rom. ix. 3-5).

To the end of his days, therefore, he reckoned himself a citizen of Jerusalem, a member of the commonwealth of Israel, an inheritor of the promises. He belonged to the election; he was in line with Abraham, Moses, Samuel, and the prophets; his were the Songs of Zion, and the hopes of a consummated kingdom. As he gazes across to the temple, and down beyond upon the city roofs, the first vision of his birthplace melts into the vision of a nobler birth, a better heritage, and the very words that tell of Tarsus quiver with a deeper meaning, as he says, "I am a Jew—a citizen of no mean city."

III.

But besides the citizenship of Tarsus and of Jerusalem, the one giving wide extent to his outlook upon the world of men, and the other intensity of feeling as regards a Divine vocation and the election of grace, the apostle holds another franchise, counted incomparable in the estimation of men: the citizenship of Rome. As we learn a little later in the narrative, this must have been in his mind even when the soldiers were binding him; but, because of the hubbub and attempted violence of the Jews,

it would have been futile then to protest. When, however, a little time afterwards, "the chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, bidding that he should be examined by scourging . . . Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" This being reported to the chief captain, and Paul, on being questioned by the latter, affirming his Roman citizenship, that officer exclaimed in amazement, "With a great sum obtained I this citizenship." Whereupon the apostle answered, "But I am a Roman born." That saying, as with magic spell, unloosed his thongs, and those that were about to scourge him went trembling away; while Claudius himself "was afraid, when he knew that he was a Roman."

Thus the freeman of Tarsus is likewise a free-born citizen of that world-wide empire of which Cilicia, with all its importance, was but one of the outlying parts. The city of his childhood, with its cherished privilege of self-government, yet bore marks of the dominion of Rome. In Jerusalem, years ago, he had not been able to avoid seeing daily the signs of that same domination. Wherever he had travelled, during the intervening years, he was never outside of its confines, extending, as it did, over large parts of three continents. Roman governors, Roman magistrates, Roman soldiers, were everywhere. And even to his naturally imperious spirit there was something awe-inspiring in the seeming omnipresence of the imperial sway of Rome.

How impressive was the majesty of Rome's resolute, resistless power! Quietly, but mightily, it laid its hand upon the multifarious nations and tribes of men, and they were hushed to submissive peace. It threw the network of its efficient organ-

ization over their varying customs and interests, and, while leaving these largely unaltered, yet brought them within the unity of one common administration, making each constituent people to contribute its quota to the upbuilding of the common weal. And for each of them, in return, it provided the defence of its invincible legions, or the equal protection of its great name. Nor was Rome's power less manifest in its mastery of nature. It threw its highways across countries and continents, scorning to turn aside because of difficulties, but sending them straight to their goal; and along these highways it poured its troops, and opened up its trade, from end to end of the empire.

Inseparably associated with Rome's power was Rome's righteousness—as signifying the ordainment of right practice, in all civic relationships, and largely in social life, by that system of law which became eventually the foundation of the common law of Christendom. Wherever Rome's legions went, went also Rome's judges and magistrates; and though there had been sad degeneration as the years passed, yet even in the apostle's days the law of Rome was invested with much of the majesty of right.

In all this greatness Paul had a living interest. He might justly claim his part in this heritage of empire. And, more for the successful accomplishment of his commission as the messenger of Christ to men than for any purely personal interest, he invoked, on occasion, the protection of the law, even as he availed himself of the provision of Rome's power for speeding unhindered from clime to clime, to make known his gospel. Nor, when it was needed, did he hesitate, as, on the present occasion, to declare his citizenship, that he might

have the greater facilities for discharging his duty, and thus the better accredit himself as the Apostle of the Gentile world.

IV.

"A citizen of no mean city": there was yet one deepest meaning underlying all other significance of these words. Tarsus—Jerusalem—Rome; the culture and cosmopolitan intercourse of the Cilician metropolis, the venerable traditions and glowing hopes of the Hebrew Covenant, the prestige and protection of the franchise of Rome: surely this was a triple citizenship, civic, sacred, and imperial, with which a man might well be content.

But there was one freedom that he held, which by comparison made all other franchise poor; one commonwealth to which he belonged, that made every other seem local, parochial, small; one calling and election of such exceeding glory, that "that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect, by reason of the glory that surpasseth" (2 Cor. iii. 10). These all were but partial types of something diviner; faint shadowings forth of the real, the true. In his famous "Republic," Plato represents one of those with whom Socrates was conversing as objecting to his account of a perfect commonwealth, 'The city whose organization we have now completed . . . is confined to the region of speculation; for I do not believe it is to be found anywhere on earth.' To which Socrates replies, 'Well, perhaps in heaven there is laid up a pattern of it for him who wishes to behold it, and, beholding, to organize himself accordingly. And the question of its present or future existence on earth is quite unimportant. For in any case he will adopt the

practices of such a city.' So had the apostle learned to say, "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil. iii. 20).

From the time when, as he says, "it was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. i. 15, 16), he found himself belonging, by virtue of that new birth, to the kingdom of the eternal King, the commonwealth of freeborn souls; and, as the changing years passed, the powers of that realm of life possessed him ever more securely, and in its holy service he sped eagerly over land and sea, that he might tell of its privilege and blessing, and invite even the lowest and most forlorn to taste its gracious welcome. Was his native Tarsus cosmopolitan in its sympathies? He could say of the spiritual city, "Where there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman: but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. iii. 11). Was Jerusalem the chosen centre of a covenant people, an elect race? He says there are "two covenants; one from mount Sinai, bearing children unto bondage. Now this answereth to the Jerusalem that now is: for she is in bondage with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, which is our mother" (Gal. iv. 24-26)—yes, the mother city of the redeemed, the home of liberty. Was Rome world-wide in its proud dominion, because of the power of its legions and the august righteousness of its law? He had said, "I am ready to preach the gospel to you also that are in Rome. For I am not ashamed of the gospel: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith unto faith" (Rom. i. 15-17).

"A citizen of no mean city." The city, of which

prophets had said, foretelling its future glories, "Thou shalt be a crown of beauty in the hand of Jehovah, and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God" (Isa. lxii. 3); and of which psalmists had sung, "Glorious things are told of thee, O thou city of God! He Himself, the Most High, keeps it. Jehovah writes in the Book of Nations: This one is native here, and that one there; but, gentle or simple, the home of them all is in thee, O Jerusalem" (Psalm lxxxvii. 3, 5, 6: see the Polychrome Bible). The city, whose citizenship the Saviour of men threw open to the contrite, when He came "preaching the good tidings of the kingdom," and saying, "Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17, 23); the "abiding city . . . the city which is to come," for a people sanctified "through His own blood" (Heb. xiii. 12, 14); "the holy city, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God," with the open gates, and the ingathered glory of the nations of the earth, and the light of a never darkened day (Rev. xxi. 10, 11, 23-26), of which the Risen Jesus is the immortal King, by His life giving life to His people, even more abundantly. Such was the city to which this worn and battered apostle had free entrance, of whose full benediction he was partaker, and whose glad salvation it was the mission of his life to make known to men. Well might all scenes of the present, and all dreams of the past, grow dim as he beheld, from the castle stairs, this heavenly vision. Well might his utterance thrill with an inward rapture unrecognized by the interrogating Claudius, as he said, "I am a citizen of no mean city."

For us, as we believe on the King of that kingdom, once the Crucified, but now Alive for Evermore, the

same citizenship is free; to us the same city throws
open its welcoming gates. We may behold, with Paul,
the while we make our claim to that inheritance,

 where, faint and far,
Along the tingling desert of the sky,
Beyond the circle of the conscious hills,
Are laid in jasper-stone as clear as glass
The first foundations of that new, near Day
Which shall be builded out of heaven to God.

MY REDEEMER LIVETH

“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last He will stand up upon the earth: Whom I, even I, shall see, on my side, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger.”—JOB xix. 25, 27.

IT is a wonderful picture of prosperity that is presented to us at the beginning of this book. We see a man, whose name was Job, enjoying the manifold blessing of one whom God greatly favours, and upon whom He delights to shower His good gifts. He is blessed in himself: “perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and turned away from evil”; blessed in his relationships: the head of a happy and united family; and blessed in his worldly goods: “the greatest of all the children of the East.” But all at once the hand of disaster smites him; calamities come thick and fast; and one thing after another is taken, until almost all is gone. There is an appalling amount of tragedy compressed into the tidings of a few fateful minutes. He is told in quick succession how the Sabeans seized his oxen and asses, and slew the labourers with the sword; how the fire of God from heaven destroyed his sheep and shepherds; how the Chaldeans in three bands carried off his three thousand camels; and, last and worst, how his sons and daughters, in the midst of their festivities, were involved in the ruin of their falling house. Thus the wealth of the rich proprietor has been

stripped from him at one stroke; his children are not; and Job is left lonely, shattered, destitute.

But calamities have not ceased coming yet. He himself is touched, his bone and his flesh. A terrible disease takes hold of him—what was probably the black leprosy, the worst disease known in the East—and Job is now one mass of loathsome sores from head to foot. His wife's faith fails: "Renounce God, and die," she says. And after months of fearful suffering, the disease daily gaining ground, his three friends, who have come from afar to comfort him, only make his anguish the greater by the false comfort that they offer. They labour hard to show that, inasmuch as, according to their theory, suffering is a sure index to sin, Job, who is undeniably a great sufferer, must therefore have been a great sinner. And as he persists in maintaining his integrity, their accusations wax worse and worse, until, goaded almost to frenzy by their cruel words, Job utters forth angry and passionate accusations against God Himself. But not against the true God, whom he has known and loved; rather against the false God whom, by their misrepresentations, they portray to his disordered imagination. For, in and through all his frenzy and his ravings, to the true God he appeals, to Him he clings. And unable, as he confesses himself, to solve the problem of this visitation, he yet looks forward, through the encompassing gloom, to the bright futurity of the latter days, when all these painful mysteries shall be cleared away, and the righteousness of the righteous vindicated by God.

We need follow him no farther. In the language of the text, he rises to the sublimest confidence of hope; and it only remains for us to take the words

in which Job found expression for his faith, and see how, though in a far fuller sense, they fitly express our Christian faith to-day. "As for me, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last He will stand up upon the earth: Whom I, even I, shall see, on my side, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger."

I.

We have a Redeemer. — Why? Because we have an Adversary. He who was Job's Adversary has been the Enemy of man from the beginning, and still plots malignly for our undoing. It would prove too intricate and perplexing a question, if we attempted to determine the precise present relation of this arch-adversary of mankind to the various ills that oppress our race. But it is noteworthy that, while some theologians have lately been letting go the belief in malign spiritual beings, as set and sworn to do us harm, certain scientific thinkers have been driven by the pressure of hard facts in the natural world to postulate the existence of unseen evil powers, personalities of persistent mischief and plotting wickedness. In any case, there always looms before us in Scripture this dark, boding presence of a great Evil One, who, as the Tempter of our race, ushered in the transgression which

Brought death into the world, and all our woe;

and thus he is represented, by implication, as the original cause of all the ills that darken our lot, and make this life distressful. What are these ills?

First, there is guilt. In the midst of this beautiful creation, rejoicing in the smile of God, we are told that we are a blot upon the creation, that from us God's face is hidden, and His favour turned away.

We hear of the happy angels, that live in the palace of the King; but we are told that we are outcasts, doomed to banishment from home. We are told that we might have been lifted up one day to the blessedness of eternal life, but that now there is a burden upon us which is pressing us down and yet down to the depths of death. And our hearts tell us that these things are true. We are indeed guilty creatures, and being guilty we are rightly shut out from God. But our doom is none the less dreadful because just. Shut out from God—from God who is our life! Is there then no hope that a door of return will ever be opened to us? And the stricken soul cries out for some great spiritual Deliverer, who shall take our guilt away.

But if by any means the guilt of past transgressions were obliterated, there yet remains the tyrannous thralldom of the present power of sin, by which we should be ever urged into renewed transgressions; and thus once more we should be covered with condemnation. As the apostle declares, in his great classical passage on the power and tyranny of sin, "I find then the law, that, to me who would do good, evil is present" (Rom. vii. 21). There are thus two laws, in contrast, in conflict. The law of the ideal good, of pure heavenly beauty, shines before our view, speaking with Divine imperative and kindling ardent desire for its attainment. This is the law that tells of what ought to be: the law of sovereign attraction; the law of the uncontested supremacy of the right, the good, the true. And even while we are gazing on its beauty, and acknowledging its claim, all at once the fair vision is darkened, and "a different law" obtrudes its evil presence, and asserts its malignant power. This is the law that declares what shall be, what must be:

the law of despotic compulsion; the law of the irresistible rule and sway of sin. And, baffled and overborne by its relentless foe, the struggling soul cries, "Who shall deliver me out of the body of this death?" There is needed a Redeemer from sin's tyranny, as well as from its guilt and condemnation.

Moreover, along with sin, sorrow holds sway over the world. Job's case was indeed exceptional, but he was no unique and solitary sufferer. There have been many torn and bleeding hearts since his day, and many perplexed and baffled inquirers into the inscrutable mystery of pain and woe. It is not at all, as Job's friends averred, that the good always prosper and the wicked always suffer; but the case is often, to all seeming, the exact reverse. This indeed constituted the bitterest element in his affliction, that, having served God in all sincerity, he should be suddenly plunged into distresses that seemed the fitting penalty of sin. To Hebrew psalmists, in like manner, the same contradiction caused much searching of heart and shaking of faith. Says one of them: "I was envious at the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. They have more than heart could wish. Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning" (see Ps. lxxiii.). And still there is sometimes the same temptation to doubt the righteousness and equity of this present order of things. In our very midmost grief, when we need all comfort and sustenance, we hear the mocking voice, asking, "Where is thy God?" May we not well cry out once more for a strong Deliverer, who shall bring release?

Then there is death, the culminating mystery. "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again" (Eccles. iii. 19, 20). The good and faithful of the earth die, even as the wicked; our friends die; we ourselves shall die. This is the sorrow of sorrows, which comes alike to all; and, oppressed with the sense of our mortality, we again lift our eyes for help.

Such is our need of deliverance. And, responsive to our need, the deliverance comes. We have a Redeemer! He whom the world waited for, and prophets foretold, has come at last. We do not wait in vain; we do not watch and weep in vain; we do not pray in vain. For, while we are crushed beneath the burden of our guilt, He comes and touches the burden, and it falls away. While our struggling souls contend, almost hopelessly, with sin, and shrink back overpowered, He speaks; and lo, we have new strength, new life. While the sorrows of the world perplex and weary us, He tells us that we are not uncared for, nor are these sorrows meaningless. And even in the midst of death itself He sheds a glory round which makes the darkness bright. We have a Redeemer!

II.

This Redeemer lives.—He lived once. O the blessedness of those redeeming days, when Jesus was here among men! There were guilty ones, in plenty, where He came; but, with an authority as of Heaven's own absolution, He said to the contrite, "Thy sins are forgiven," and they that erstwhile were crushed and broken-hearted went their way in peace. He

accompanied with sinful ones, sharers in the sad entail of corruption; but those who had yielded helplessly to temptation found strength unto victory in His companionship, and caught the glow of a purer, better life. There were sorrowing ones—ah, how many!—upon whom life's afflictions had done their worst; but His healing touch chased fever, disease, and pain away, and His sympathy made disappointed and lonely ones almost forget their grief. He met everywhere with death, and its ruthless ravages; but here was One mightier than the mightiest, at whose bidding the grave yielded its prey, and dead ones woke once more to life, and to the sweet fellowship of love. Yes, He lived once, and the very desert rejoiced, and blossomed as the rose.

But He died—died from the midst of those who had trusted Him, followed Him, and found in Him so strong a Helper and so true a Friend. He died; and all the beauty was gone from their life, and their hearts were left desolate. Dead! they never thought it would come to this. It seemed to unteach all that He had taught them. And so, though their Redeemer *had* lived for them, He lived now no more. All was over; all was lost.

Nay, all was not over; all was not lost. The Redeemer lived again; He lives now! "It was not possible that He should be holden of death"—He, the Prince of Life. That was but a transient eclipse; and now the Sun of Righteousness shines forth in all its splendour—with healing in its wings. What He had been once, to those few disciples who followed Him in Judea and in Galilee, He is now to all mankind. Think, indeed, how much more He is to us—He, the Risen, Spiritual King—than He could be to those with whom He companied in the days of His humiliation, of His weakness, of His limitations. It

is true that guilty ones then heard His absolving voice, speaking pardon and peace. But we know—as they knew not—how He has “made peace through the blood of His cross”; that very death, which seemed to them at the time an irretrievable disaster, having proved the well-spring of life for the world. And, as our living Intercessor, He now presents one Sacrifice to God for ever. They did, indeed, experience, as by anticipation, the power of a new life, coming under the spell of that holy, gracious Presence. But we have learned what He meant when He said, “It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send Him unto you” (John xvi. 7). The Ascended Saviour sheds forth evermore, upon His praying, waiting ones below, the Spirit of truth, of love, of power. It is true that sorrowing ones were soothed, and mourners comforted, by the Man of Nazareth. But they were only the few, and even for them the relief was but partial. Now He tells us, “All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth” (Matt. xxviii. 18); and we may be well content to leave our interests in His hands, and our whole life under His sovereign care. There were, indeed, dead ones raised to life of old; but even they must once more die. So that one wonders whether rather to spare them some regret, that a second time they must pass through that dread experience, or to rejoice with them, that, having once proved His resurrection power, they would go all fearless to meet their disarmed and disabled foe. But He, who Himself has gone that way, making all its darkness light, now says, for the strengthening of His weakest ones, “I have the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev. i. 18); yea, He tells us, “Whosoever

liveth and believeth on Me shall never die." Our Redeemer lives!

III.

He shall one day be made manifest.—We need not only trust for the present, but hope for the future. For, great as is the present salvation accomplished for us by Him who "ever liveth" as the Redeemer of His people, it is nevertheless incomplete. Although, believing in His name, we may say, "There is now no condemnation"; yet we still live in a world that bears everywhere traces of the curse, and in the midst of circumstances that are stamped plainly with the character of retribution. And though for those that believe in Jesus the power of sin is broken, and they prove that "this is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John v. 4); yet they still abide in the midst of "the corruption that is in the world," and still have to contend strenuously for their undefilement. As children of sorrow, it is true that we are drawn the nearer to His heart, and "we know that to them that love God all things work together for good" (Rom. viii. 28); but even though we see the meaning of sorrow, and trust the more because of the love that chasteneth, we nevertheless feel the actual smart of a chastening which "seemeth for the present to be not joyous, but grievous." And although death does not, cannot tear us from His care, yet it does cut us off from this fair creation of our own familiar earth, and from all its sweet society. Thus far, therefore, it is an evil, not a good; and with the whole dark train of sin's effects and consequences, and with sin itself, we must believe that it will some time be utterly done away. So the language of faith prolongs itself into

the exultancy of hope: "I know that my Redeemer liveth, and at last He will stand up upon the earth."

"At last." We wonder, nay sometimes we are tempted to murmur, at the delay. But God has a double purpose to serve by this seeming inactivity: He would give fuller time to those that oppose Him, and He would strengthen the faith of those that trust Him. "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness; but is longsuffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. iii. 9). God has long patience with men's unbelief. The same love, also, that suffers long with those who are hostile, waits long for faith's maturing. For "one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

So let us wait God's instant men call years.

"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation" (Isa. xxv. 9). It is not for us "to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority." But the latter day shall come!

And then the Redeemer's deliverance of His people shall be consummated. At last the great brand of guilt shall cease to show any faintest trace, where God's people dwell; for "there shall be no curse any more." Nor shall they be subjected any longer to the adverse influences of evil; for into the blest abode of the redeemed "there shall in no wise enter anything unclean." There, too, sorrow shall have breathed its last sigh, and God "shall wipe away every tear; neither shall there be mourn-

ing, nor crying, nor pain, any more." And death? "Death shall be no more: the first things are passed away." (See Rev. xxi. 4, 27; xxii. 3.) O blessed hope!

"At last" our unseen, but faithful, watching Christ will be made manifest. "He will stand up" as the great Goel, the Kinsman, the Vindicator of His people. He "shall appear a second time, to them that wait for Him, unto salvation" (Heb. ix. 28).

O at what time soever Thou,
Unknown to us, the heavens wilt bow,

Yet let my course, my aim, my love,
And chief acquaintance be above;
So when that day and hour shall come,

Thou'lt find me drest and on my way,
Watching the break of Thy great day.

IV.

I shall behold Him, face to face.—Very emphatically does Job express his conviction that he will participate, most immediately, most intimately, in the redemption of the latter day, and that of the Redeemer Himself he will have closest, fullest vision. "Whom I, even I, shall see, on my side, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger."

"Whom I shall see": thus is the open vision of that day distinguished from the faith of this present time. The faith described in the earlier words of Job's great saying is very strong, very precious. And, through all times, faith has been the strong sustainment, the inward consolation, of God's people. By faith they do great things; by faith they endure. Such faith could not find itself, it could not come to its strength, nor learn its possibilities, without the

testing and the discipline involved in a life which is lived apart from Christ's manifested presence. The absence of the manifestation throws us back on our inward convictions, and intensifies faith's assurance and possession. "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. i. 8, 9). But this salvation of the soul is to expand into a larger, fuller, completer salvation, when patience shall have had its perfect work. And the present testing of our faith is to prepare us for "praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ." "Whom I shall see"—exchanging the preparatory for the final, the partial for the perfect, the temporary for the permanent. "For now we see in a mirror, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know fully even as also I was fully known" (1 Cor. xiii. 12).

"On my side": for here, as in Job's case, God sometimes seems to be against us, and our faith is pained at even the suggestion of hostility. God's actual hostility is the most terrible thing in the universe. "I will set My face against that man" (Ezek. xiv. 8)—what can be comparable with such a doom? On the other hand, what bliss can compare with the clear shining of God's countenance? "Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee" (Ps. lxxiii. 3). And to know that God is working for us; to have evidence that He is ordering all things for our good; to be able to cry triumphantly, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom. viii. 31)—this is indeed the very guerdon of the godly life. But there are times when this is not manifest; when the contradictions of life

confuse our thought; when faith must fall back on its own resources, unsupported by outward evidence. "Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him.—Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" Thus did Job long for the day of vindication. And at last He shall show Himself, before all worlds, His people's Friend.

"And mine eyes shall behold": for no assurance of mere posthumous vindication of our cause, of impersonal immortality, will satisfy the cravings of the soul. We must have individual experience of the things which God is preparing for them that love Him. Nor is it enough to know that others—the elders of our race, the firstborn of the faithful, or even our own nearest and dearest, who have gone on before—enjoy the beatific vision, as our representatives and forerunners. This indeed is our happy assurance. Nevertheless we ourselves press to the fulfilment of the promise, "Thine eyes shall see the King in His beauty" (Isa. xxxiii. 17). Yes, "I, even I, shall see . . . and mine eyes shall behold." So intensely individualistic is the hope of our calling.

"And not as a stranger": thus is the last touch given to the vivid portrayal of that fruition of our hope. There shall be not only the personal vision of the Redeemer as openly vindicating His people's cause, and honouring their faith; but the tenderer, the more confidential, the intimate communication of His love. For every humble believer may say with the apostle, "I know Him whom I have believed" (2 Tim. i. 12); and to all of us that other apostle's words are spoken, "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, if He shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him

at His coming" (1 John ii. 28). No, "not as a stranger."

But He whom now we trust in
Shall then be seen and known,
And they that know and see Him
Shall have Him for their own.

Let us hold fast to this assurance of faith. Then, though there will come times when, as we think of the sinful past, a dark shadow may fall across our path; yet, as we say, "I know that my Redeemer liveth," our guilty fears will be banished, and we shall step forth once more into the light. And though the power of sin will make its presence felt, and sometimes in the deadly conflict we shall be smitten into helplessness; yet, with the watchword, "My Redeemer liveth," we shall spring to our feet again, and the foe shall be beaten back, and we shall be more than conquerors. Though the shadows may gather around us on our pilgrimage, as the lights of life are put out one by one; yet, with sorrows multiplying, amid the thickening gloom, we still may say, "My Redeemer liveth." And at last, with this same watchword trembling on our latest breath, we shall find the way of death to be the way of life—life more abundantly, even life for evermore!

THE LAST PASSOVER

"And He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: for I say unto you, I shall not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God."—*LUKE* xxii. 15, 16.

LIKE almost all other dwellers in Jerusalem, Jesus and the disciples had been anticipating the passover feast; and, on the day of preparation, Peter and John had been making ready, while Jesus Himself desired with strong desire.

The word "passover" carries us back in thought, some thirteen hundred years, to that night of horror, when "all the firstborn in the land of Egypt" were smitten, "from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon." But, in the midst of this panic of multiplied midnight death, whereas of the Egyptians "there was not a house where there was not one dead," the Hebrew homes were unstricken every one—for the word was fulfilled which had been spoken, "Draw out, and take you lambs according to your families, and kill the passover. And ye shall take a bunch of hyssop, and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and strike the lintel and the two side posts with the blood. And when He seeth the blood . . . Jehovah will pass over, and will not suffer the destroyer to come in unto your houses to smite you" (*Exod. xii. 21-23*). And they were commanded

to observe the passover sacrifice and supper, year by year, through all their generations.

Thus the long, long series had held on its way, as the years and the centuries had passed, every Hebrew household and family offering the sacrifice, and partaking together of the supper that celebrated their deliverance. But this was to be the last passover. Not in one sense. It was continued, as at that time, some forty years longer, both by the unbelieving Jews, and also by some Jewish Christians. And even after the destruction of the temple, although of necessity greatly altered in its character, it was not abolished. This, however, was the last passover with any real significance. For, when the Sacrifice which all the foregoing passover observances prefigured was itself accomplished, where was the need, where was the consistency, of any more prefiguring? The ordinance, as such, was annulled. And on the very morrow of this celebration was to be offered up "the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). Was it a wonder, then, that, this being the last passover of so long a series, the last because of its impending fulfilment in the Sacrifice of so much greater a redemption, Jesus should regard it with peculiar feelings, and desire it with strong desire?

But not only was this the last passover supper with any consistent meaning; it was the last opportunity of such fellowship with His disciples. They were His chosen ones; and how blessed had been the seasons of converse and communion! With them He had rejoiced to share both His journeyings and His rest. They toiled and endured together; they abode together. It was a blessed brotherhood. Now all these opportunities were over—except this last. For in a few short hours He would be torn

from them, and they would be left desolate. Having all this in view, would there not be a strange pathos in His words, "With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer"?

Yet it was not regret for a past, with its failing joys, that filled all His thought, and absorbed His feeling, while He spoke these words. For the tremor of His voice, as He remembers these things, becomes lost in the exultant tones of a new hope: "until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And, casting His thought forward, beyond the immediate intercourse of this transient hour, to a fulfilment of these transitory interchanges of affection and sympathy, that shall itself know nothing of perishableness or change, He cheers both Himself and them with the prospect of a new, a better, an abiding fellowship.

I.

What was this fulfilment of which He spoke? Was He thinking of the far-off bliss of Paradise, when the kingdom should be consummated? Was it something so distant as this, that the disciples were to anticipate? Is it something so distant, to which we must look forward? "Until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God": was this, after all, so far off? Certainly the final, the best, the perfect fulfilment was to be looked for at the consummation of all things; but on the very morrow, as we have seen, He was to fulfil this passover in the kingdom of God. Yes, then was to take place the inauguration of the new dispensation, the better covenant, with all its blessing and spiritual fellowship. It would not, in all its parts and aspects, be at once complete. Whether we survey the progress of God's kingdom through the ages, or study the teaching of the

Scriptures on that theme, nothing is clearer than that God works, in this as in other things, sometimes indeed by crises, by great moments, by swift and startling transformations; but also by development—development over which He has long patience; which may certainly be hastened or retarded according to the measure of our faith and obedience; but which He Himself has ordained shall be gradual, moving on, by successive unfoldings, by surer applications, to the predestined result. But though, at each new crisis, there would be, according to this law of gradual accomplishment, only a partial manifestation, at first, of the significance of the critical change, yet the change would be essentially effected from the first, and all its new intention and purpose would be present, even if only in part made known.

The ancient passover was of two parts, though each involved the other: namely, the sacrifice and the supper. The former was partly retrospective—looking back to the deliverance from Egypt; partly prophetic—looking forward to a better sacrifice, which should accomplish a greater deliverance. The latter was a fellowship, into which the participants were drawn together by their common interest in the blessings of one holy covenant—by whose bonds they were bound to one another and to God. The sacrifice of the passover, as foretoking the “one sacrifice for sins for ever” (Heb. x. 12), which was to be offered at the end of the ages, could not, in the nature of the case, be fulfilled otherwise than “once for all” (x. 10)—although the fulfilment, even in this case, might not meet with an equally immediate recognition and appreciation. From the moment when, on the cross, Jesus said, “It is finished,” the sacrifices of the old economy were for ever superseded, because they had found their climax; they

were annulled, because fulfilled. And that fulfilment was final.

Not so, however, in regard to the fellowship. A sacrifice is an act; a fellowship is a state, a condition. The one is practically instantaneous; the other is continuous, permanent. The fulfilment, therefore, of the fellowship of the old passover feast, although perfect in its intention and spirit, from the beginning, might well have to wait for its full realisation; and only when the imperfectnesses of this present time shall be all done away, and all things be made new, will it come to its completion. Nevertheless, the spiritual fellowship of Christ's new kingdom would be very sweet, and the bonds binding His people to Himself and to one another very sacred. The fellowship which He had been having with them, as they walked by the way, or sat side by side in the house, unspeakably superior as it had been to any ordinary fellowship, was yet very imperfect in comparison with that which He now anticipated and foretold. "Until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God": for it wanted now but a little while, and, as He said, "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no one taketh away from you" (John xvi. 22). Did it not thus come to pass? Some ten days after He had ascended from them into heaven, the place was shaken where they were all together, and they became aware of a mighty, a blessed Presence; and it touched them, it moved them, it thrilled them through and through; till each one said, as he read his own wondrous rapture on his brother's face, "It is the Lord!"

Nor has there been wanting the same fulfilment in all the ages that have passed; nor is it wanting to-day. You remember the time when first you heard the words, as whispered to your heart, "Behold,

I stand at the door and knock : if any man hear My voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with Me" (Rev. iii. 20). You hearkened to that call, "so thrilling sweet"; you yielded willing entrance to the Guest; and O the blessed, new experience which was then begun—

the intercourse,
Never to be broke off again
To all eternity !

Thus the new Supper, now instituted in place of the old, itself, like the passover supper, both retrospective and prophetic,—looking back to the accomplished salvation of the finished sacrifice, looking forward to the completed fellowship of the consummated kingdom,—was not so much a special communion, with mystic meaning, limited to the actual commemoration and anticipation of an appointed occasion, as the sign and pledge, and therefore the fostering help, of an abiding fellowship. "He took bread, and brake it, and gave to them, saying, This is My body." There was a sense in which these words were literally true. His sacred body, the human vesture of the Son of God, was fashioned of such particles of man's familiar and common nutriment as composed the bread which He held in His hand. By such actual bread of life it had been sustained from day to day. And by the same bread of life is ours sustained. Whenever, therefore, we eat of that bread, whether at the appointed sacramental feast, or as partaking of our daily, necessary food, we should think that so near did He come to us,

Of our flesh and of our bone ;

that "in all things" He might "be made like unto His brethren" (Heb. ii. 17). But this material

identity between His nature and ours is only of value as subservient to the complete identity of affection and sympathy, and therefore to the true and perfect fellowship, into which we are brought with Christ. Thus the bread is the symbol of the union of love. And that union between Christ and His people abides; for He said, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20).

Nor between Christ and His people alone; but, as a consequence, they are united each to each, and have fellowship one with another. For so, on that same night, He prayed "that they may all be one . . . that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one" (John xvii. 21-23). Of this unity the same bread is the symbol. "The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor. x. 16, 17). The promise of the abiding Presence is made to the disciples collectively: "I am *with you* always." It is fulfilled to each individual, but only as the individual cherishes love to all Christ's own, for Christ's sake. A breach of the law of love breaks and forfeits all love.

But, besides embodying and emphasizing the fellowship, the new Supper shows forth the Sacrifice which must ever be the great central binding force of this Divine society. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come" (1 Cor. xi. 26). Even as He Himself said, on that last night, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, even that which is poured out for you." Yes, that frail vesture of His holy life, concerning which He said, "A body didst Thou

prepare for Me" (Heb. x. 5); the pure, but worn, bruised body, betokened by the bread—this was "given" for us, given in tireless devotion, as He spent His life for our sake; given in ungrudging sacrifice, as at last, for our sake, in death He "offered Himself without blemish unto God" (Heb. ix. 14). And the blood, which the wine betokened—one common principle of life, of which both He and His people were partakers—that "precious blood," as one of His disciples called it (1 Pet. i. 19), remembering how he had seen it streaming from brow, and hands, and feet, as this unresisting Victim let sin, and sin's emissaries, do their very worst upon Him, that His people might be saved: that blood writes evermore, and ever with more deeply crimsoning characters, across our faith's vision, "Who loved me, and gave Himself up for me" (Gal. ii. 20).

Hence our hearts melt, our eyes o'erflow,
Our words are lost; nor will we know,
Nor will we think of aught beside,
'My Lord, my Love is crucified.'

And for us all that body was so broken; for us all was that precious blood poured forth! How can we, then, but love one another, who are loved with that same great love, so true, so infinitely tender? and how can we do other than serve, or suffer, for one another's sake, as constrained by that all-redeeming grace of our Saviour Christ?

This brings us to yet one other aspect of the fulfilment of the passover fellowship in the kingdom of Christ. He said, as He looked round upon the disciples, and recognized that virtually that fellowship was already in large part fulfilled: "Ye are they that have continued with Me in My temptations." They had entered, and should shortly enter more

fully, into the meaning of His sufferings, His sacrifice for sin. But to enter, as chosen ones, into the meaning of the sufferings of this dearest, holiest Master-Friend, must involve their own participation in the same. How touching it is to read that He craved the participation of their sympathy! "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and *watch with Me*" (Matt. xxvi. 38). Ah, surely, never could they forgive themselves, that that opportunity of continuing with Him in His temptations was so utterly forfeited! Other opportunities—though never one so unique—would come; and they would find, not only that the very faith by which they were saved was impossible, save as involving "the fellowship of His sufferings" (Phil. iii. 10); but that the solemn significance of that same salvation could never be made known to others, except in proportion as they felt the sins of men with a sorrow like their Lord's. His one sufficient Sacrifice, in itself complete and finished once for all, needs to be linked on to the sacrificial devotion of His people, before it can accomplish all its purpose for a sinful world. Why is the world's salvation so long delayed? Nay rather, do we ourselves hear Him saying to us, as He said in Gethsemane, "*Watch with Me*"? and can we say, with the apostle, "I fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh" (Col. i. 24)?

Yea, through the Shadow of an Agony
Cometh Redemption—if we may but pass
In the same footprints where our Master went,
With Him beside us.

Hold fast His hand,
Though the nails pierce thine too!

II.

Such being the true fulfilment of the last passover, a fulfilment nigh at hand for the disciples, when, so soon after the fateful morrow, the kingdom of God should come with power; what was the significance of it all to others? and what to those of the disciples who might feel that they were unworthy of the name? and what is its significance for us to-day?

There were those outside who were bitterly hostile, alike to the King and to the kingdom: "the chief priests and the scribes sought how they might put Him to death." Mistakes concerning His mission and ministry might be condoned, and merely personal slights forgiven. Yes, "every one who shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him" (xii. 10)—for such offences, being more on the surface of our careless unbelief, do not necessarily imply an irremediably abandoned nature. "But unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Spirit it shall not be forgiven"; for, as it is written, "There is a sin unto death" (1 John v. 16). And so to harden the heart against all the gracious goodness of Christ's redeeming ministry, as not only not to discern its worth, but even to hate and oppose and seek to kill Him for this cause—that was the unforgivable, because ultimate, resistance of the Spirit, by Whom that ministry itself was inspired, and who sought to inspire faith in the people for whom Christ lived, and whom He loved unto death. Such hostility, in those days of the fulfilment of the kingdom of God, can mean only the fulfilment of perverseness, of blindness, of doom.

There were those outside who were careless—the careless, unthinking, fickle crowds; who, in their very carelessness and fickleness, would soon be shout-

ing, "Crucify Him!" But for those multitudes, in whom there was yet a better self, if only it might be awakened into life, He was ever praying, as He prayed for the soldiers, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (xxiii. 34). And as, half broken already into penitence, by and by "the multitudes that came together to this sight, when they beheld the things that were done, returned smiting their breasts" (xxiii. 48); so to-day "this sight" of the Crucified has still its power to move, to melt, the heart of thoughtless unbelief. Thus the fulfilment of the passover sacrifice is ever multiplying the fulfilment of the passover salvation.

Another there was, of the disciple-company, but also of the fellowship of hate and wicked plotting—strange link between the Upper Room and the courts of conspiracy—the traitor Judas. "Satan entered into Judas, who was called Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went away, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might deliver Him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money." Thus the plot was accomplished; the deed was done; and, under guise of the kiss of love, he delivered Him to His enemies. Mysterious inversion of the fulfilment of grace that was coming to the disciples. For them was the Covenant of redeeming love, with its holy bonds and constraining power, pledging their Lord to love them to the uttermost, and pledging themselves to live and die in His service, for His sake; for Judas, the covenanting of shame—the bartering of that Life for gold, the while he sold his own very soul to sin and death. For the disciples, in the bonds of the Covenant, there was the veritable Holy Communion of brotherly love, growing as they grew in the knowledge of that greater Love; for the

traitor, only the base communing with those who first used, and then spurned, their slave—to be followed by the tyrannous communion of his own remorse, and then of dark despair, and at last of dreadful death. So does apostasy still invert, with direst retribution, the blessings of repudiated grace, until, the very vision of these apostate ones becoming blindness, and their good all evil, “it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance” (Heb. vi. 6).

But were not the disciples themselves unworthy, both of the fulfilment of salvation, and of participating in the sacred Supper that showed forth that dying, albeit deathless, love? Ah yes, and unworthy we shall ever be; but the less unworthy in proportion as we humbly yield ourselves, with all our unworth, to that Love’s desire. For with desire He still desires us—our poor hearts, our imperfect lives. O joy of joys, that even we may say, “The love of Christ constraineth us”!

IDYLLS OF HOME LIFE

“And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, and to return from following after thee : for whither thou goest, I will go ; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge : thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”—RUTH i. 16.

“Grace, merey, peace shall be with us, from God the Father, and from Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.”
—2 JOHN 3.

IN a certain very charming edition of the Scriptures, which presents them as arranged according to their literary form, Ruth, Esther, and the Song of Songs are placed together as Biblical Idylls. Nor can the most cursory reader be insensible to their idyllic beauty. This is especially true of the book of Ruth. It breathes of the fragrance of the countryside, and is blithe with the merriment of the harvest field. We have other idyllic pictures of Hebrew life interspersed among the histories of those olden times, as in the stories of the patriarchs. Some of the psalms also are idylls of happy life : as the psalm of the Golden Age (lxxii.), the psalm of the Pilgrimage to Zion (lxxxiv.), the psalm of the Happy Harvesters (cxxxvi.), the psalm of the Happy Home (cxxxviii.). There are likewise portions of the gospel narratives that have the same idyllic charm. This is the case with regard to much of the ministry of the Man of Nazareth, especially His gracious ministrations among the Galilean hills and vales, and on the shore of the lake, as well as in more sequestered places on the

farther side. Nor must we forget the idylls embedded in His popular teaching. For, just as the scenes of nature were adopted as the chosen framework and setting of His great discourses, in order that the birds of the air and the flowers of the field might become object lessons of the truth He taught; so, in His parables, He often availed Himself of the same familiar rural imagery, in order to stamp that truth for ever upon the memory of mankind. Who can ever forget the parables of the Sower, the Mustard Plant, the Ploughman, the Lost Lamb, the Householder's Vineyard, the Marriage Feast, the Lost Son?

When we pass from the gospel history to the account of the apostolic work and testimony in later years, we find that in some respects the scene has changed. Not only do we miss the open-air blitheness and festivity of the old Hebrew times, but we find no mention, as in the Gospels, of fields of corn or songs of birds. They were such strenuous days—days still darkened outwardly by the storm-clouds that closed in around our Lord's life at the last, although brightened to the disciples themselves by the glory of the resurrection—that the combatants in that holy war could scarcely turn aside to listen to the messages of these worlds of nature, and of homely human life, in which Jesus found so much material for His teaching. Yet here and there we have glimpses into the sweet sanctities of a home life that might well furnish subject matter for nobler celebration than that in which the poets of this world have glorified their themes. For it was a life hallowed, sweetened, and made radiant with the dear, true, changeless love of the Christ who had died and was alive for evermore. Such is the glimpse afforded us in this lesser and more private epistle of the beloved

disciple. He writes "unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in truth; and not I only, but also all they that know the truth." And almost every word that follows reveals the holy intimacy of a consecrated home. Was it perhaps, as some have surmised, not an anonymous "lady" to whom he wrote, but one whom he addresses by the Greek name Cyria, the counterpart of the familiar Martha, as also signifying "lady"? If so, we have a picture yet more idyllic in its interest, as reminiscent of the home at Bethany; and the "elect sister," of the closing words, may be the Mary who sat at the Master's feet, in those blessed days of old, having chosen the better part. And though, from the Ruth of the corn-fields to Cyria and her household, living in the quiet joy of Christ's grace and truth, may seem a far distance, both of time and of state; yet they form companion pictures, as setting forth the sweet sanctities of loyal human affection and sympathy, stamped with the Divine signature, and hallowed with heavenly benediction.

The young Moabitess, who would not be persuaded to leave Naomi, saying, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God"; and the elect lady, concerning whom and her children the apostle could say so confidently, "Grace, mercy, peace shall be with us . . . in truth and love": these both teach us truths that are at once the strength and the fair beauty of our human life.

I.

We are reminded, first, of the sanctity of the primal bonds of life's closer and enduring relationships. It is the loosening of these bonds which, even in its first beginning, threatens to undo the innermost

structure of the social fabric, and to bring down the most prosperous commonwealth in disastrous collapse. And one reason why the old-world idyll of Naomi and her daughter-in-law has been enshrined in the loving respect of ages, is that it exhibits such unswerving devotion between the two, such loyalty of pure, true love. Nor, on its human and homeward side, does the idyll of Cyria and her children fail to reassert, and, in reasserting, to reinforce with all Christian significance and emphasis, the same lesson concerning the life of home, of kindred, and of friendship, that it must be lived "in truth and love."

Our very religion itself is worse than nothing, unless it is broad-based upon the great primary moralities of life, especially those which concern the family and the home. In face of the sin which, in one form or other, is ever seeking to beguile to a violation of those moralities; which often, in these days, throws the blandishments of romance over such violation, so that the slime of the serpent's trail is not heeded, because of the fascinating glitter of its scales; and which sometimes, growing bolder, assails the very relationships themselves, which these moralities would sustain, with its arguments of specious sophistry—in face of all such enticements or inducements to tamper with them, in ever so little degree, the great law still speaks, as with the thunderings of the throne of God, "Thou shalt not!" And the fulfilling law of Jesus, abating not one jot or tittle of the eternal command, shows rather how it searches into the most secret desiring and imagining of the heart, still sternly forbidding whatever would so much as breathe a sully breath upon the mirror-like purity of true home love.

The family is an older institution than either

Church or State ; the parent has claims prior to those of either king or priest. The laws of a country have never so perjured themselves before high Heaven, whose behests they are appointed, and virtually pledged, to fulfil, as when they have interfered with the intrinsic claims of home relationships, instead of seeking to guard them jealously from threatening harm. A Spartan republic, in actuality, or an ideal republic, like that of Plato's dreams, whatever its other claims to admiration, is guilty of a poisoning of human life at the very fountains, when it disturbs, for whatever reason of supposed expediency, the delicate adjustments of pure, true family life and love. Nor can any theory of improved social arrangements, in our day, however legitimate may be its attempted ameliorations of the common lot of men, escape the damning brand of Anti-Christ upon its forehead, if it arrogates to itself the right to revise the ancient moralities of home, as founded in the monogamy of Eden, fenced by the austere sanctions of Horeb, and interpreted by the perfect law of Jesus.

But the danger has often been deadliest from another quarter. Indeed, it is one of the most distressing ironies of history, that those who bear Christ's own distinguishing name should often have been the worst foes of that wholesomeness of pure home life around which He threw the protection of His most jealous care. It is one of the deadliest misdeeds of the Church of Rome, as well as of those who emulate its doings, that by its doctrine of the superior sacredness of the celibate life it has cast imputations of commonness upon what God has hallowed, and by its intrusion of the prying and prurient confessional into the proper privacy of the home, it has gone far to make home confidence im-

possible and family affections but secondary in their claims. For all the desecration of what should have been a guarded Eden, caused, directly or indirectly, by these wanton interferences, as well as for those more private and personal delinquencies, on its own part, resulting from the recoil of its evil system upon the character of its accredited agents, let that Church answer for itself, at the great day, in His presence, who, to such misdemeanants, most of all, is a consuming fire. But let England, and its kindred communities, also look to it, lest the darkening shadow of that same blight, which has brought decay and downfall to once potent empires, should grow and prevail, until this realm of light and liberty becomes a land of the shadow of death.

There is another present-day peril to the integrity of our home life, which is not altogether easy to account for, but which prevails very largely, even among the best-ordered families. The young are restive under home restraints, nor are they held, as aforetime, by the gentler and sweeter associations of home life. Even when keeping themselves from the grosser temptations, and remaining attached and loyal to other home claims, they seek their pastime and pleasure away from the home circle, and find their chief interests outside, the home becoming more and more a mere lodging-place. But this, though a less direct and offensive danger, is equally real, and, by its gradual undermining of the foundations, may bring about at last a disaster even more complete. For, when the foundations are once destroyed, and the structure falls, one chief safeguard against the more noisome temptations will be gone, and the young life of our country will become the easy prey of uncontrolled indulgence and lawless appetite. As our great prose-poet has well said,

‘When men do not love their hearths, nor reverence their thresholds, it is a sign that they have dishonoured both, and that they have never acknowledged the true universality of that Christian worship which was indeed to supersede the idolatry, but not the piety of the pagan. Our God is a household God, as well as a heavenly one; He has an altar in every man’s dwelling; let men look to it, when they rend it lightly and pour out its ashes.’ And he is able to say of himself, ‘I never disobeyed my mother.’

Not only, then, must the Seventh Commandment be still our faithful sentinel, keeping watch for the first approach of the foe without, and our equally faithful monitor, lifting up its voice in unfaltering forbidding, whenever we are tempted to parley with that same foe, in the treacherous disguise of friend; but the Fifth Commandment—“the first with promise,” as we are reminded (Eph. vi. 2)—must also be heeded, speaking with its positive behest, as it bids us pay our reverent homage, our loving regard, at the sacred shrine of hearth and home, bringing evermore the tribute of our trust and love to those ‘without whose life we had not been’: the wealth of whose affection, the tirelessness of whose devotion, we shall never know; whose years, as they become touched with the snows of life’s winter, should command our yet tenderer veneration, and whose memory, when they have passed into the Silent Land, should serve the more to keep our hearts young and fresh and true.

This regard for home is the very Sabbath of life’s relationships, bringing benediction and endless peace (Lev. xix. 3); and one motive, which the commandment itself urges upon us for its observance, is, “that thy days may be long, and that it may go

well with thee, in the land which Jehovah thy God giveth thee" (Deut. v. 16). The causes are manifold which are set in operation for this result. A pure, sweet home life is one chief guarantee, other things being equal, of health and happiness, and these tend to length of days. Moreover, the qualities and habits which are fostered and trained in true family fellowship, by its mutual ministries of trust and love, go far to secure the respect and confidence of men, and thus help to build up life's success. But the nearer and dearer regard of the home's own intimacy, with its delicate thoughtfulness, its ever present sympathies, and its alert and eager helpfulness, is the true guerdon that comes to those who themselves are loyal to its claims; while this perpetual benison of the home is a parable and a pledge of the benediction of Heaven.

II.

It is an easy passage from this teaching concerning the great foundation truths, the primal principles, of the home and family, to the homelikeness of the new fellowship of Christ, as this is represented to us in the pictures of its first beginnings, and reproduced in after times, whenever the true spirit of Christianity asserts itself and prevails. There has been, indeed, much perversion. From two sides powerful forces were at work to produce what we may call ecclesiasticism—though this is to allow a sad deterioration in the meaning of the grand old word *ecclesia*, which signified the congregation and commonwealth of the free. There was Judaism, with its ancient and venerable cult of the temple, the priesthood, and the ceremonies, including a sacrificial system very elaborate and impressive; and there

was imperial paganism, largely running parallel with the religious institutions and ritual of the Jews, though blotted with idolatry, disfigured with manifold superstitions, and sheltering instead of checking sinful indulgences. It is matter of history that the simple faith and worship of the religion of Christ was at last overborne by these influences, and even as yet it has only partially recovered from their effects. The faith which is properly personal trust in the Saviour Christ became a more or less mechanical assent to a creed; the worship which is essentially of the heart became conformity with the requirements of a ceremonial; the life of passionate devotion to the heart's true Lord became blind and bigoted zeal for one prescriptive order and form of sacred things; and the fellowship of faith and love, which was the very being of the true Society of Jesus, was merged in external adhesion to a system, in the outward observance of the rules of an establishment.

If, however, we go back to the beginning, we shall find that the Church of Jesus Christ was fashioned after the pattern of the family and home. Was not this the case, essentially, in the time of our Lord's sojourning upon earth, and association with the Twelve? Who were they, but, to all intents and purposes, His family? Master and servants; Rabbi and followers? No; such relationships, though having some points of contact with His relation to His disciples, are too hard, too cold, too formal, to set forth the meaning of that sacred circle of close friendship, that hallowed intimacy, that tender communion. "No longer do I call you servants; but I have called you friends" (John xv. 15). Yes, the Friend who chose, among the friends who were chosen (xv. 16); the Guardian and Guide, among those whom He shielded and led;

the Elder Brother, among those of His household and home. This unique character of the little community was becoming more and more definite as the two or three years passed on, until in that last fellowship of the Upper Room we behold it at its fullest and best. Of structureless simplicity as regards organization, but embodying a potency of love that should avail for renewing the face of the earth, that fellowship of Jesus, in the midst of which a child might have sported unabashed, but whose seriousness of intention was so high and resolute, at once rebukes our pedantic formalities, and puts to shame our contentment with conventional routine.

When we pass from the days of the Son of Man to the dispensation of the Spirit, and take knowledge of the new community of the Pentecostal times, we find no essential difference, and certainly no departure from the true homelikeness of the early fellowship. We see believers multiplied into thousands, and there needs to be provision on a larger scale for the oversight and care of so many; but they are still one simple-hearted, trustful, joyous brotherhood. "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul . . . and great grace was upon them all" (Acts iv. 32, 33). In the later establishment of Gentile churches we see the same characteristics continually repeating themselves. The Apostle Paul could say to the Thessalonians, "We were gentle in the midst of you, as when a nurse cherisheth her own children . . . because ye were become very dear to us . . . as ye know how we dealt with each one of you, as a father with his own children" (1 Thess. ii. 7, 8, 11). And, whether he writes to the wilder Celtic people of Galatia, or to the more cultured circles of Ephesus, whatever differences there may be in the ways and customs of

the various races from which converts were made, in every case he insists on maintaining the same essential character of the new community, as "the household of the faith" (Gal. vi. 10), "the household of God" (Eph. ii. 19). Indeed, the whole of the new life that was lived by those upon whom had passed the power of the blessed Name was summed up in the one word "fellowship"; even as said the disciple who had the earliest right to tell of that experience, having caught it warm from the heart of Jesus, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 John i. 3). Whatever, therefore, destroys, or even mars, the essential comradeship of believers, the frank mutual communion of the saints, the joyful homelikeness of the Church, is a grievous sacrilege against that fair ideal of a regenerated humankind, which, hovering before us as a "holy Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God," can be actualised, as in the earliest years, only by those who are ever "giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit," and who have truly learned that "there is one body, and one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all" (Eph. iv. 3-6).

In full accord with this essential homelikeness of the Church of Christ is the character of that ordinance—as we call it, though the very flavour of such a term goes far to prevent our appreciation of its simple beauty—which is the permanent attestation, on Christ's part and on our own, of the reality of the new fellowship: the Sacrament of the Supper. Just as, when choosing a fit emblem of the renewal of our nature by faith in His Name, He adopts so

familiar and homely an act as the washing with water; in like manner He selects, as the symbol of that partaking of His intimate life which is the secret of the new fellowship with one another and with God, so homely and common an episode as an evening meal. It is the time when the affairs of the world no longer crowd upon us; when we can have more leisurely intercourse; when, under the subtle influences of the passing of the day, hearts are more consciously drawn together. And the repast is itself the reminder of our common frailty, of our common need. Fittingly, therefore, do we pledge ourselves afresh to our Lord, accepting His pledge, as we eat of the bread, and drink of the cup, reminded the while of the body in which He bore our sins, and of the shedding of His blood. And, realising the solemn brevity of life's passing day, we pledge ourselves likewise each to each, partaking of one bread of life, and cleansed by the same blood. But, with all its sacredness, and even solemnity, it is the Supper of the Home, and the great House Master welcomes us to the table of His grace.

Have you heard the great Householder's call? His chosen ones He gathers at His table; but He is not satisfied while wanderers remain outside. O hearken, as, from the ever open doors of His hospitality of grace, He calls to you, 'Come home!'

III.

Does not that call, however, carry our thoughts farther, does it not lift them higher? The ordering of our life in this world often prophesies of another life; and certainly in God's gracious ordainment for the nurturing and refreshment of our spiritual life there is much that is prophetic. So is the pure, true

home of this world's affection, and so is the home life of the Church's fellowship, a pledge, an earnest, of another, a better home, which these may foretoken, and in which they themselves shall find fulfilment, but which has in store those surprises of sweet blessedness that will require "the ages of the ages" for their unfolding.

When our Lord would speak His last, best saying about that other world—of which indeed He said but little at any time in words, though always making it present, in its essential reality, as the sphere in which He lived and moved, and of which He was native—He told of a Father's House, with its many abiding-places; of the preparing of those abodes, which He went to accomplish; and of the certainty of His return, to meet them, as they too must go that way, and to take them home, thrice-welcome guests.

Nor does the apostle hesitate to tell of other homes within the protective encompassment of that greater home, of families in heaven the perfected analogues of those on earth (Eph. iii. 15); and thus we are doubly reminded that the idylls of home life, so sweet as we meet with them here, shall have fulfilment elsewhere. Our lesser home circles do indeed foretell the larger household life, the glorious expansion of the family that will gather around the Firstborn. But the lesser will not be merged in the larger; the more individual attachments and associations will not be superseded by the universal fellowship. To "every family in heaven," the perfected counterpart of that household life on earth of which it is the final outgrowth, there shall be given a completion, a consummating grace, which will make it a fit and seemly unit of the great communion of the Father's House.

Thus, then, do we see how through the ages God has been building a house. In the very earliest times He laid its foundations deep and strong; but almost from the beginning these foundations have been threatened, and they are threatened still, by those who, repudiating God's great basal truths of human society, would run up a flimsy and temporary structure upon the shifting sands of wayward caprice and errant desire. In the elder times, and in these later days, God has had His witnesses—His watchmen and workmen, who have looked to the building of God's house on the strong substructure of rock. Among these, Moses was pre-eminently "faithful in all God's house" (Heb. iii. 5); and the prophets, re-uttering afterwards, as with words of flame, the same fearless testimony. Then came Christ, taking His rightful place, "as a Son, over God's house"; and, looking still to the foundations, He also adorned it with all manner of precious stones. On His own confessed Sonship He builds the home of God's household, an impregnable fortress against foes without, so that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 16, 18); but, within, full of the comfort and gladness of "a habitation of God in the Spirit" (Eph. ii. 19, 22). And whereas the tent-life of this present time, with so many precious associations of dear friendship, will inevitably be broken up ere long; yet they that have been intent upon the cherishment of things not seen, making the very disappointments of the present tributary to the enrichment of the future, may say, with the certainty of those who know, "We have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens" (2 Cor. iv. 17—v. 1). And so at last shall they be "at home with the Lord" (v. 8). *At home*, as finding there the fulfilment of

all promise and prophecy pertaining to this life's fellowship of truth and love. For "them that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring" to us at that home-coming.

Their lives are made for ever mine ;
What they to me have been
Hath left henceforth its seal and sign
Engraven deep within.

Mine are they by an ownership
Nor time nor death can free ;
For God hath given to Love to keep
Its own eternally.

THEY CAME TO MARAH

“And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter : therefore the name of it was called Marah.”—Exod. xv. 23.

WE may make a mistake in regarding the wilderness life of the Hebrews, during their forty years of wandering, as a sheer misfortune, an unqualified punishment. Primarily, indeed, it was a penalty, with which they were visited because of their unbelief. But it was by no means without its compensations. What life was more free than the life of those far-stretching deserts? especially as compared with the crowded city life of Egypt, and its tasks of galling thralldom. The wholesomeness, also, of that open-air life, with its continual movement, and manifold occupation, was invaluable as preparing them for the claims of the coming years. And the wilderness discipline—both the systematic discipline necessary for the management of so vast a host, and the unsought discipline of circumstance and event—was likewise an essential preliminary for the eventual achievement of their mission. As helping to constitute this discipline, there were the ceaseless changes of their migrations from place to place, involving sometimes painful contrasts and bitter disappointment. But thus were they being inured to trial that they might be strong.

So is it with that larger human life of which the

wilderness journeyings of the Hebrews were an enacted parable. It has its recurrences, its sameness, its wearisome routine. But it has its changes, lesser and larger, painful and pleasant. Much of life's change, even as including its minor trials and hardships, serves to give life a healthy zest. For, just as the traveller rejoices the more in the warm glow of the welcoming hearth, after wrestling with the storm, so do we prize the more life's comfort and sweet security, after privation and threatening danger. There are, however, severer changes, constituting a sterner discipline, by which we are trained to learn life's deeper lessons.

I.

"Moses led Israel onward from the Red Sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter; therefore the name of it was called Marah." Such was their first experience of disappointment after the emancipation from Egypt. And this life of ours, with all its gratifications and fulfilment, yet sometimes yields disappointment in large measure, and very grievously. In this matter, we begin, like the Hebrews, at the very beginning of our pilgrimage. For our childhood's days are plentifully darkened with the lesser disappointments incident to child-life. We may smile, looking back from the experience of our maturer years, as we remember the trifles that made our hearts heavy. But though trifles to us now, in remembrance, they were not trifles then, in childhood's actual experience. They constituted a very real discipline for our young

days. It is as though God were putting us through a rehearsal, so early, of the disappointments that will surely come in later years.

And they come at last, with all their serious consequence. They come in many guises, and in various degrees; but they come to all, soon or late—life's Marah experiences. It is told in the biography of one whose marvellous ministry closed, too early, little more than half a century ago, that, coming as he did of a family of soldiers, he had, from his earliest years, a passion for the soldier's life. 'Before he was five years old, he drank in, with all the eagerness of a boy, the intoxicating aroma of his father's profession.' This passion was fed and fostered, as the years passed, by all the associations of his youth; until at last his chosen desire seemed destined to be gratified, and he was promised a cavalry commission. 'He was enraptured, and immediately began to study for his profession with enthusiasm.' Two years went by, in ceaseless and assiduous preparation. 'He imagined that it was his peculiar vocation to bear witness to God, to set the example of a pure and Christian life in his corps, to be, as he said, the Cornelius of his regiment.' Thus he studied, with minute care, India, and the strategy of British campaigns in that country—India being the destination of the regiment to which he hoped to belong; also, the religions of India, and the history of Indian missions. Seldom, surely, has there been such an instance of a dual ambition; blended into one noble purpose of consecration to the service of Christ's kingdom. There was unaccountable delay on the part of the authorities in the fulfilment of the promise regarding the commission; at last he yielded, most reluctantly, to the wishes of his father, and the advice of friends, and gave up the aim and

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longing of his life; he went to Oxford to study for the ministry; and a few days after the irrevocable step had been taken there came the long delayed offer from the army. So was the brilliant and devoted Frederick Robertson led to Marah, and a disappointment was allowed to befall him, that tinged, more or less, his whole career with sorrowful regret. But had there not been the disappointment, the most fruitful ministry of the last century would have been wanting to the world.

Disappointment may come, often does come, in the faithful fulfilment of a sacred service. Was it not so in the case of one most illustrious of the servants of Christ's kingdom? We see him taking pleasure "in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake"; yes, and he tells the people, his whole life proving it true, that he will "most gladly spend and be spent" for them. But it seems to him sometimes, that the more abundantly he loves them, the less he is loved (2 Cor. xii. 10, 15). So was the great apostle inured to disappointments, which were the keenest, that, abounding in sorrow for himself, he might abound, to others, in the consolations of Christ's sufficient grace.

Besides life's disappointments, arising from the non-fulfilment of cherished hopes and expectations, there are life's positive and distressful afflictions. This world, with all its surface gaiety, is the repository of histories of pain. If only one hospital could disclose its secrets, making known the experiences of affliction that have been focussed there from time to time; and if we could, in some degree, enter sympathetically into the innumerable cases of disease, with their antecedent apprehensions and forebodings, deepening at last into dread certainty, and their various accompaniments and consequences of

privation and disability—but no feeling heart could bear the burden of these recounted ills. Yet such an accumulation of sad histories must be multiplied a myriadfold; and even then the world's tale of affliction is but begun. For if we are taken into confidence, we find that almost every household has its own associated histories of disablement, pain, and disease. Too many have been the pilgrims on life's strange journeyings who have come to this Marah, and sat down by its bitter springs. This is indeed the general heritage of mankind. Is it not so appointed?

When God formed in the hollow of His hand
This ball of earth among His other balls,
And set it in His shining firmament,
Between the greater and the lesser lights,
He chose it for the Star of Suffering.

And beyond life's personal afflictions come life's bereavements. Thus does affliction recoil at last on others. We watch our suffering ones; we tend them; we are absorbed with solicitude in their behalf, forgetting ourselves in anxious longing for their recovery, or, when this may no longer be hoped for, in the yearning to relieve their pain, to beguile their weariness. But there is a day when all at once—with terrible suddenness, despite foreboding—we awake to the consciousness that our ministrations are no longer needed, that our anxiety may cease. Now it is of ourselves that we are bound to think—of the blank, the emptiness, the dismal solitude. Yes, we have journeyed on our way; we have looked forward, O so eagerly, to the place of verdure, and watersprings, and song; we come at last—to Marah!

II.

Such are some of the fulfilments, in the perennial experience of mankind, of that old desert story concerning the Hebrew people: "they came to Marah." But that was not the end of the history; nor does God lead men to these bitter springs, on life's journeyings, that He may leave them there with the bitterness of their disappointed hopes, their afflictions, their bereavements. "The people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? And he cried unto Jehovah; and Jehovah showed him a tree, and he cast it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet." So is it written of another tree, of which that bush in the wilderness was but a symbol, "the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations" (Rev. xxii. 2). But what does this signify? For the description is still symbolical, figurative. Our thoughts are taken back to the first paradise, and the forfeited fruit of the tree of life, made free to our approach once more in the restored paradise of the kingdom of grace, even as it shall throw abroad its bountiful benediction in the kingdom of Christ's glory. This can be nothing other than the love of God, offering itself as our present possession in Christ Jesus, and luring us onward to its full fruition in the heavenly inheritance.

Is it not true of this 'dear redeeming grace,' that it 'evermore makes all things new'? And, as mingling with the manifold Marah experiences of this present time, it so transmutes them, that the bitter is changed to sweet, and what we thought to be loss becomes our more abundant gain. In other words, there are wrought out for us, through life's various discipline, results so rich in blessing, that the price paid by means of disappointment, affliction,

bereavement, shall at last seem to have been but small. Consider some of these great compensations.

There come to us, in the dark seasons of life, clearer visions of Divine and eternal things. Nearly fourscore years ago, a sonnet was published which has won what may be thought extravagant praise, one great critic pronouncing it the best in the English language, and another speaking of it as perhaps the best in any language. The mystery is, that the writer wrote no other poetry, so far as we know, worth reading. In that sonnet he suggests what may have been the feelings of Adam in Paradise when the shadows of the first night began to fall. What was the meaning of the threatened eclipse of Eden's beauty? The sunlight, that had lit up the blue canopy above with its glory, had also made radiant the foliage and blossoms of that garden of the Lord, and in the same genial sunshine the gay living things had found their joy. Must all this vision of delight be lost? His apprehension deepens, and at last his worst fears are realised: the world in which he has found his pleasure lies concealed beneath a pall of darkness, and the glory of the noon-day sky is gone. But lo, a wondrous vision chides his regret, as he beholds, for the first time, the worlds beyond worlds of God's greater universe, which had lain concealed beneath the veil of the sunlight. The darkness which conceals the nearer objects—and this only for a brief while—reveals the unsuspected existence of those glorious constellations. The poet goes on to ask—and it is this suggestion which makes the poem of inimitable worth—

Why should we then shun Death with anxious strife?
If Light conceals so much, wherefore not Life?

But we may well be reminded by this same

parable, that the darkness of our sorrows, when, by Christ's grace, we sorrow not as those that have no hope, serves to make us alive to those great realities which we were in danger of forgetting, the heavenly, the Divine; breaking with all its glory upon our vision, when other things are veiled from view. "For our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. iv. 17, 18). It was when he had become blind to the sights of this world that Milton saw, and sang, the splendours of God's kingdom. And it was in the gloom of the prison that Bunyan beheld the wondrous meaning of the Christian pilgrimage, and caught glimpses of the Celestial City. One of our most successful medical missionaries in China resorted to the device of affixing texts of Scripture to the walls of the hospital wards, prepared with luminous paint, so that, when the darkness drew on, these sayings of God shone out in view of the wakeful sufferers, making vivid in the night-time what might have been overlooked by day. And so does God still inspire songs in the night season of our grief.

Again, there comes to us, in the afflictive experiences of our lives, a stronger sense of the Divine sympathy. When all things go well with us, according to the valuation of the world, we are apt to live on the surface; for the world's prosperity and happiness are always more or less superficial, and therefore slight. But in affliction deeper lessons are learned. We know ourselves more truly in sorrow than we could ever know in unchastened joy. Our

thoughts, and our searchings, then go down to the bases of the soul; we take account of the more permanent meaning of this life of ours. It is in sorrow, also, that we know others best, because then our friends come nearer, they enter more deeply into our experience, and their fellow-feeling wraps itself tenderly about our stricken and wounded souls. In like manner, we know God the best at such times, for this is His chosen opportunity of approach to our faith. Nor can we ever have so intimate an assurance of His sympathy as when He comes, with quick fellow-feeling, to share our grief. There are distresses into whose depths others cannot descend; and we are baffled in our endeavour to take knowledge of our own case, and its meaning. But there are no such limitations to the sympathy of God. "I pour out my complaint before Him; I show before Him my trouble. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Thou knewest my path. Look on my right hand, and see; for there is no man that knoweth me; refuge hath failed me. I said, Thou art my refuge" (Ps. cxlii. 3-5). So does He become indeed our Emmanuel, God with us. Our failure is success, our loss is gain, if it makes us sure of God.

And there is wrought out for us, in the midst of life's weaknesses and fiery trials, the unconquerable energy of Divine sustainment and immortal hope. We owe some of our sweetest Christian lyrics, and some of our most exultant watchwords, to one who fulfilled a rare ministry of instruction and inspiration in the north of London for a few brief years, himself passing the while through an ordeal of unabating pain such as has fallen to the lot of few even of God's chosen witnesses. Indeed, all his life was a protracted martyrdom; and besides his bodily

afflictions, he had to bear the worse burden of misrepresentation, calumny, and persecution. Before entering the ministry, he said, 'I would that I might aid in bringing comfort and refreshment to weary and deadened hearts; also in sending light into minds over which God's providence rests as a dark cloud. These things need to be done. Men talk much and loudly about saving souls, who never looked full, long, and boldly into a soul to see what it is.' Being obliged to spend many hours in solitude, because of his weakness, he learned the deep things of God—and of man. He fought with pain, he defied his weakness, he forgot his sleepless nights of excruciating suffering, that he might minister to his people; and on the Sunday he spoke to them as a prophet, while he and they alike tasted of the powers of the world to come. Out of weakness he was indeed made strong. Over the whole of his sorely stricken but most brave career might well be written the words from one of his noble hymns—

Ever by a mighty hope
Pressing on and bearing up.

He said once, 'After the wave has gone a hundred times over my head, my head for the hundred and first time appears again over the wave, and is greeted by a sunbeam.' And when at last he died in his prime, he said, 'Now I am going to begin to live.'

Was it not the same with the great apostle, who, when he was visited with some grievous affliction, the more grievous because it seemed to him that it must surely hinder or spoil his work, "besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart"; but who, when it had been said to him, "My grace is sufficient for

thee: for My power is made perfect in weakness," exclaimed, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Wherefore I take pleasure in weaknesses, in injuries, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong" (2 Cor. xii. 7-10). He had the right, because of the quenchless courage of his faith and hope, to speak of himself "as chastened, and not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as dying, and behold, we live" (vi. 9, 10). Thus, then, when God brings us to the bitter watersprings of Marah, He may really be making us to drink of "fountains of waters of life." And so Marah itself may become, by anticipation, an Elim, with its twelve springs of water, and threescore and ten palm-trees (Exod. xv. 27).

God has brought all of you, at some time or other, to the place of bitter springs—or perhaps even now you are tarrying at your Marah. Let me ask you, then, what have you done, what are you doing, with your Marah experiences? There were times when the Hebrews would fain have gone back into Egypt, to the old life of degradation, but of certain low indulgences: "when we sat by the flesh-pots, when we did eat bread to the full" (xvi. 3). No doubt there were many who would gladly have gone back from Marah to the waters of the Nile. And, in like manner, we may seek to escape from the bitternesses of our life, and to content ourselves with ignobler but easier conditions. Sometimes this is possible; indeed, there are many who have forgotten the great word, which the Captain Himself made perfect through sufferings, speaks to those whom He would thus fashion for high service: "Hold fast that which

thou hast, that no one take thy crown " (Rev. iii. 11).
You, perhaps, are tempted to this recreancy.

But if, impatient, thou let slip thy cross,
Thou wilt not find it in this world again,
Nor in another; here, and here alone,
Is given thee to suffer for God's sake.

O think of that great Cross, of which our crosses
are but broken parts; think of His Marah, of the
sweet-bitter, the bitter-sweet, of Gethsemane and
Calvary. And then be humbly bold to say,

'Tis Thy wounds my healing give;
To Thy Cross I look, and live!

LOVE'S FAITHFUL WAITING

"Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me."—JOHN xxi. 22.

As we overhear this conversation between Jesus and the once denying disciple, our thoughts go back to another conversation of only a short time before, and itself on the very eve of the denial, when Simon Peter, taking up a remark just made by Jesus, "Ye shall seek Me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go ye cannot come; so now say I unto you," had asked, "Lord, whither goest Thou?" And to him the saying was repeated, but with a great qualification, "Whither I go, thou canst not follow Me now; but thou shalt follow afterwards." Peter urged his question persistently, "Lord, why cannot I follow Thee even now? I will lay down my life for Thee." Then fell upon his startled ears the foretelling of the imminent denial.

To follow Jesus at that time meant to follow Him to death. But this, if it implied a true following, and not merely that he should die coincidentally with Jesus, would require such sympathy on Peter's part with the spiritual significance of the Lord's service and sacrifice, as would make him, so far as a disciple could be, a fellow-partaker of the sufferings of Christ as the great Sin-bearer for the world. Peter, at that time, was without such true spiritual sympathy. This was evidenced only a little while later in

Gethsemane, when such sympathy was actually sought by Jesus: "Then saith He unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: abide ye here, and watch with Me" (Matt. xxvi. 38). But even after so pathetic an appeal, Peter and the two others slept instead of watching. It was no wonder that Jesus said to His captors, while the disciples stood by dazed and confounded, "Let these go their way." For, without true insight into the meaning of His redemptive obedience and sacrifice, the following of their Lord to death would have been but the loyalty of brave, despairing love. As it was, so far as Peter was concerned, the loyalty itself broke down, so soon afterwards, in the sullenness of that despair.

Now, as they hold converse on the shore, in the light of another morning, but with the memory of the denial only too fresh in the mind of one of them, Jesus presses home the probing of His triple questioning, "Lovest thou Me?" while at the same time He renews to the disciple the commission of love's high, though lowly service, and then foretells—even for Peter, who, though so protesting, had proved himself so unready to follow Jesus to His dying—the privilege of love's sacrifice. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Now this He spake, signifying by what manner of death he should glorify God." Very significantly it is added, "And when He had spoken this, He saith unto him, Follow Me." What he was not fit to do once, he shall do some day. Yea, even from this time he begins the following which is to issue at last in a sharing of

his Master's death. Henceforth he presses eagerly to that consummating privilege of his faith and love.

But as they converse, somewhat apart from the rest, the disciple whom Jesus loved, unwilling to lose now any moments of that precious Presence, or to forgo any words, which he may properly hear, that fall from those lips, follows wistfully, not far behind; when Peter, turning and seeing his comrade, asks, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" And it is in reply to this question that Jesus says, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou Me." Through all the long years that followed, long after Peter's impetuous zeal had hurried him to his martyrdom, John, surviving to a lingering age, was ever haunted by the sweet music of those words, the last which he penned in his Gospel, "If I will that he tarry till I come."

I.

In all this sacred conversation there was a mystic meaning, which does not reveal itself to the thoughtless or worldly. Like our Lord's parables, and the messages to the Seven Churches, it needs the cautionary reminder, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." What was it, exactly, to which Peter should thenceforward press on so eagerly, and for which John should more quietly, but no less longingly, wait? It was what has been happily termed the Lord's tryst with His chosen ones. There was a place, a time, for each one of those whom He loved, at which there should be at last that meeting face to face, so longed for through life's weary years, which should prelude and prepare for the endless years of heaven's blessed fellowship. It was the

place, the time, for the Lord's fulfilment of His tryst. Such a one as Peter, who cannot live unless he lives eagerly, hastily, impetuously, may go in quest of the trysting-place, where Jesus will keep His word, and come to greet His eager follower; and such a one as John, who is so sure of the great realities that he can afford to be patient, and wait, may be long at the trysting-place, waiting only for the trysting-time. But, in either case, Jesus comes to keep His word.

What is the meaning of this promise, "I will come," or, as He sometimes expresses it, "I am coming"? It is impossible to read the Scriptures carefully without recognizing the manifold significance of the great Advent of which, from first to last, they tell; and the Coming One, when at last He had come, having visited His people for their redemption, still said of Himself, "I am coming." But even this latter Advent parts into different, though closely related, applications and fulfilments, according to the testimony of His own lips, and of the apostolic teaching. The primary intention of the Advent, most broadly considered, is for mercy: He came to redeem, and He shall come again to consummate that redemption. But the intended and proffered mercy, which is for faith, involves sentence of judgment upon the unbelief which rejects and despises the mercy. Therefore it is that the day of the Lord is so often represented as a great and terrible day—it shall be the day of the visitation at last of delayed judgment on those who, with stubborn unrepentance, resist the will of love. Of this advent of condemnation and retribution Jesus spoke at large during the great discourse on the Mount of Olives. This, then, is one chief distinction. But there is another distinction, affecting

each aspect of the former, as depending upon whether the advent of the holy and gracious One concerns more immediately the individual or the community. The great Coming takes place, at different times in the world's history, either in behalf of nations and peoples, for their help and deliverance, or with wrath and indignation towards them for their wickedness. It takes place, also, at many a critical turning-point of each one's personal history, sometimes for our signal chastening, but ah, how often for our signal rescue or benediction ! One Advent, in many parts and numberless unfoldings, ever tending to complete itself, but never fully consummated while the changing years pass—of this He may well say, to the community or to the one soul over which He watches, whether for warning or for inspiration and encouragement, "I will come"; "I am coming."

But while He is ever coming, there is a sense in which He is never fully come; and therefore we are told of a great fulfilling of the Advent that shall gather up into itself these lesser and preparatory fulfilments, whether of judgment or of mercy, whether for the multitude or for the individual. For His Church He shall come at last, to end its chequered history of alternate trial and triumph, and to inaugurate the blessedness of the everlasting kingdom; for a world of wickedness, to bring in the final doom. In either case, the individual will participate in the final significance of that great Advent, as affecting the many, collectively considered; for all separate histories, so often indeed blended here, both in well-being and in ill-being, come to a great focussing at last, in which there shall be a further fulfilment of what may have found already its separate, individual fulfilment. Never-

theless, that individual fulfilment is of profound and ultimate importance, as related to our individual lives; and as pointing to the goal towards which they tend, this side the great general Advent of that Day, Christ says, "I will come"; "I am coming." Was it not, in part at least, if not wholly, of this individual advent that He said to the disciples at the last, when their hearts were sad because of the approaching separation, "I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also"? We do not wait for the home-gathering of our own beloved until the great day; nor do we wait till then to meet our best-beloved, the Lord of Love, our Saviour. "I come"—not after the lapse of untold ages, but soon, swiftly. He makes His appointment with us to meet Him at the trysting-place of—death, dare we call it? If so, the very name must bear a transfigured meaning, even as the experience itself is altogether transformed, being put to such a purpose. For all that remains of death's gloom to those who there meet the Lord of Life is but the chastened glory of the overshadowing of His love.

When shall the tryst be fulfilled? at what time shall we enter into the cloud?

Ah! what time wilt Thou come? when shall that cry,
The Bridegroom's coming! fill the sky?
Shall it in the evening run,
When our words and works are done?
Or will Thy all-surprising light
Break at midnight?
Or shall the early, fragrant hours
Unlock Thy bowers,
And with their blush of light descry
Thy locks crown'd with eternity?

II.

To some, that coming of the Lord to fulfil His trust, that meeting face to face when life's course is run, is with demonstration, as though a light shone suddenly from heaven, and loud voices rent the sky. What we call death comes swiftly, suddenly, startlingly. Men are rapt away to meet their Lord as in a chariot of fire.

So was it to be with Peter, and his life should be one impetuous hastening towards that glorious finding of his Master, lost awhile. His had always been the eager, impetuous nature. Long ago, when the disciples had been passing a night of terrible suspense on the lake, and "in the fourth watch of the night He came unto them, walking upon the sea," Peter, at first startled, like the others, by the seeming apparition, yet, when "Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid," grown bold in a moment, was for hastening on the treacherous foot-hold of the waves to meet his Lord. He it was, also, who was foremost in the great confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 16); and he, alas, who was foremost in the well-meant, but presumptuous, rebuke, when our Lord had foretold His sufferings and death, "Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall never be unto Thee" (xvi. 22). On the mount of transfiguration, this same disciple was forward with his suggestion, "Lord, it is good for us to be here: if Thou wilt, I will make here three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah" (xvii. 4). In like manner, many times during the earthly ministry of Jesus, Peter was quick to speak, quick to act. He could not hold himself in quiet restraint. He must always be hastening the ac-

complishment of whatever is in hand, or of whatever presents itself to his lively imagination. So, when the end came, it was Peter who protested, in spite of warning, that, whatever happened, he could never be unfaithful; it was he who, at the arrest of Jesus, thought to justify his boasting of fidelity by smiting with the sword; and it was he who, in the embarrassed confusion caused by the sudden challenging in the court of the high-priest, again and again denied his Lord. When there came tidings of the resurrection to the wondering disciples, Peter and John ran eagerly to the sepulchre; and though "the other disciple outran Peter,"—for a quieter love can move very swiftly,—it was Peter who, unafraid, "entered into the tomb" (John xx. 4, 6). So now, just before the conversation on the shore, while John recognized, it was Peter who, plunging into the water, hurried to his Lord.

His life henceforth, and his labour, are to be signalized by the same quality of eager, impetuous haste, sometimes betraying him into mistakes, as aforetime, oftener giving a fine leadership to the forces of the new faith, and confounding their antagonists. He is the spokesman of the apostles in the early days at Jerusalem, confronting with counter-charges the accusations of the rulers of the Jews, not caring if, by so doing, he bring upon himself the swift silencing of death. So does he hasten, in the following of his Lord, even as he hastened on Easter Day to the place of the empty sepulchre: he hastens evermore to the appointed meeting, though it be another Golgotha, the place of a cross of death.

Even so did it come to pass. There is a beautiful old tradition, done finely into verse by one of our poets, that, during the demon-raging fury of the

Neronic persecution, Peter, visiting the harried flock at Rome, who nevertheless were undaunted in their brave stand for the Name of Christ, was one day waited upon by the threatened Christians, who urged him to leave the city of death, that he might continue, in less dangerous places, to carry on his apostolic work.

'Not in yon streaming shambles must thou die;
We counsel, we entreat, we charge thee, fly!'

The apostle protests that his place is the place of danger, and that, come what may, in Rome he will remain. One by one they plead—for the sake of multitudes who will be as sheep without a shepherd, for the kingdom's sake, for Christ's sake—that Peter, though for himself not caring, yet, as caring for others, may seek safety in flight. At last he yields—yields to their importunity. He goes forth, in the night-time, through the Capuan gate. Stealthily, swiftly, he pursued his way

To the Campania glimmering wide and still,
And strove to think he did his Master's will.

But he fights with pursuing doubts. Is his flight cowardice? or is it for the sake of longer-continued testimony? Is he still true to the voice which said, "Follow thou Me"? Soon shall he have his answer. What is that vision of the night?

Lo, on the darkness brake a wandering ray:
A vision flashed along the Appian Way.
Divinely in the pagan night it shone—
A mournful Face—a Figure hurrying on—
Though haggard and dishevelled, frail and worn,
A King, of David's lineage, crowned with thorn.
'Lord, whither farest?' Peter, wondering, cried.
'To Rome,' said Christ, 'to be re-crucified.'
Into the night the vision ebb'd like breath;
And Peter turned, and rushed on Rome and death.

In like manner, the long succession of martyrs, whose muster roll is not yet complete, have hastened swiftly to their glorious tryst with their Lord, whom they also have heard saying, "Follow thou Me." So did such a one as Gordon of Khartoum, brave soldier ever, and ever brave as a chosen soldier of Christ, press on to the appointed meeting-place, where he should see and greet his Captain. And many a missionary—like him who, after but a few weeks' service in a deadly clime, died saying, "Though a thousand fall, let not Africa be forgotten!"—has hastened to the same tryst.

III.

But there are others to whom the Lord's fulfilment of His tryst is tardier, and, when it comes to pass, quieter. It is not so much that they follow, to find Him whom their souls desire; as that, abiding with patient faith, at last they are found of Him. One day, while they are waiting, the veiled messenger comes, and whispers, "The Master is here, and calleth thee."

It was this tarrying of trustful love that awaited the beloved disciple, and such quiet, sacred tryst at last, in fulfilment of that saying of Jesus, "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" This was in accord with the disposition of John, and with his quiet assurance of faith. True comrades as they were, there was the same difference between himself and Peter, as between the Martha of Bethany, who must be ever busy, and the quiet Mary, who sat at the Master's feet. While Peter, on the first impulse, was swift to speak and act, John, thinking long and deeply, and loving much, held so great a treasure in present possession, as not to need an

outlet of immediate demonstration ; but when at last there was the peremptory necessity of doing or of suffering, he would be found unfalteringly faithful and true. Thus, in the old days of discipleship, while the other disciples were busy about many things, or sometimes perhaps talking idly with one another, John was quietly on the watch for the first token of his Master's mind and will, and hid in his memory every word that fell from His lips. So deeply did he drink of the fountain of that unexhausted love, that, by the inevitable attraction of like to like, he was drawn ever into a closer intimacy, until at last his recognized place was near the heart of Jesus, and "the disciple whom Jesus loved" was his familiar designation.

He has his reward. When, on that last sad night, Peter's fitful impetuosity has sent him out into the night to weep bitterly, John remains quietly in the high-priest's house, near to Jesus. And when, a few hours later, Peter stood somewhere afar off, on Golgotha, to see that sight, John kept his station, with Mary, at the foot of the cross on which his Lord hung dying, and received the benediction of that parting trust, "Behold, thy mother !"

During the early days of the new Church, that charge held John in comparative restraint, while the others spent themselves in various engrossing activities. And afterwards, as they went abroad on their tireless mission in ever growing circles of activity, it was still his mission to tarry, to watch and wait, and meanwhile so to ponder the deeper things of the ministry of Jesus,—things that had more or less escaped the apprehension of the rest,—that by and by he should be able to enrich the Church for all time with his great completing Gospel.

Even when at last he was set free from his com-

parative seclusion, by the death of Mary, and entered on the apostleship of the Asian churches, now bereft of their former leader, he was still as one who "tarried," rather than as Peter or Paul, who moved swiftly from place to place. And so, whether at Patmos or in Ephesus, he waited, until it seemed as though the lingering years were loth to let him meet his Lord. But he waited unfretting, unwondering. There was with John a secret which filled the passing years so full of a sweet possession, that his life was one long tryst with his Lord—a tryst of which the last meeting would be but the final perfecting. "If I will that he tarry till I come": or, as it may perhaps be better rendered, "that he abide while I am coming"—for to him Jesus was always drawing near in sweet communion; he felt himself still, as of old, to be resting on His breast; and so he was well content to "abide" in the present, or to pass, by almost imperceptible transition, to the more perfect, fellowship of love. For that love of Jesus was the reality, transcending life, defying death, in which he was always "at home."

EVENING AND MORNING

“And there was evening and there was morning, one day.”
—GEN. i. 5.

THUS is struck the keynote of the triumphant hopefulness that rings through the Bible from first to last.

In these words we have the summing up of the whole of the first paragraph of the chapter—or, as perhaps it might be better regarded, the first stanza of this noble Hymn of Creation. “In the beginning,” a desolate and empty earth: yes, but there were the heavens, with their plentiful beauty. “In the beginning,” an abysmal depth of chaotic gloom: yes, but there was the dove-like brooding of the Spirit of God. “In the beginning,” darkness: yes, but darkness yielding to the diviner light; night softening—breaking—merging into day. For this is the true significance of the words of the text. It is not a loose way of saying that day is made up of morning and evening; nor merely an adoption of the Hebraic mode of speech and reckoning—though this may have suggested the thought. But it is an utterance betokening profound spiritual insight into God’s purposes of grace, as they should be unfolded in the after times. The vision which the inspired seer beholds of the beginning of things thus carries within itself a sevenfold prophecy of what shall be hereafter: “There was evening and there was morning, one day.”

I.

Let us first consider the relation of this utterance to its setting, and to the whole question of the inspiration of Scripture.

The Bible is not a scientific treatise, nor a legal document, but a literature. All forms of literature are pressed into the service of spiritual truth. Among the rest, poetry holds a most important place. But poetry must be treated as poetry. The poet takes his material as he finds it, while the inspiration with which he transfigures this material belongs to his own soul. In a legal document we look for technical precision of phraseology; in a scientific treatise, for rigid accuracy of fact. But literature, as such, and especially poetry, the highest form of literature, aims at certain effects upon the soul of man; and these effects, depending upon its higher qualities, are to a large extent independent of its mere framework.

This may be illustrated by two notable examples from the poetry of our own time. In 1847 was published Longfellow's sweetly pathetic poem, "Evangeline." The story of the poem was founded upon a painful episode in the troublous times of the middle of the eighteenth century in British North America. There was thus a groundwork of actual history to the poem, and no doubt the poet would use every means then available for an accurate ascertainment of the facts. But it was not his prime purpose to teach the history, nor was it at all essential to his purpose that the history should be in every respect accurately represented. A severely scientific historian might find matter for criticism in some of the statements, or in the perspective, or in the colouring. This, however, would not in any wise affect the

value of the poem, as a poem ; any more than the value of some of Shakespeare's historical plays is affected by any want of accuracy, intentional or unintentional, in their representation of history. For a poet, dealing with history, may, and often does, deviate from historical accuracy of set purpose, presenting the facts in such a way as to make them more effective for his own particular intention—which is not the recounting of history. He may, if it suit his purpose better, invent the facts altogether ; or he may shape and unshape actual facts at his will. Therefore, even if careful research were at any time to bring to light details at variance with those that constitute the story of *Evangeline*, no one would for a moment wish the poem to be revised in the interests of historical accuracy. It makes its own proper impression, as a poem ; it teaches its own truth : and this was all the poet's aim. The same may be said of Tennyson's great poem, "*In Memoriam*," in regard to the biographical and autobiographical groundwork underlying the subtle speculations, the delicate play of fancy, the prolonged conflict of fear and hope, of those remarkable cantos. Some details are admittedly inaccurate, as when, in canto xix., he says :

The Danube to the Severn gave
The darken'd heart that beat no more.

Fifty years later, Tennyson wrote, "It is news to me that the remains of A. H. H. were landed at Dover. I had always believed that the ship which brought them put in at Bristol." But who would have wished the poem altered ? As a poem, and for the truth it teaches, it is not in any wise affected by these things. Nor, to bring this instance into yet closer contact with our present subject, does the

poet's contention with an unspiritual science, and his contrary assertion of spiritual verities, become at all affected by any scientific inaccuracy, should such be at any time found in those portions of the poem which deal with this theme. He took science as he found it, but only as so much material, for which other would have served as well, to form a scaffolding for the beautiful structure of his poetic thought.

In all probability the writer of this great inspired prologue to the Bible availed himself of the best scientific knowledge of his day. Even that was not despicable, as the record proves—and as we should be prepared to believe, from what we now know of the marvellous civilization of that ancient world to which he belonged. But this was only material for a higher use; and the use was everything, the material nothing in comparison. This higher use was the manifestation of the Divine act, and method, and purpose, let the lower details have been what they may. Science must still make its own independent researches, and come to its own conclusions, in matters pertaining to its own proper sphere. With these, as such, the Bible has nothing to do. Its province is moral and spiritual truth, and especially the truth concerning redemption. In the beginning, whenever that beginning was; whatever may have been the nature of the original nucleus, or germinal source, of things; whatever the process of development; however long, or short, the periods of development—at the back of it all, controlling it all, and before it all, was the Living God. Science, always more or less imperfect, may marshal its facts; and the science of those far away days marshalled its facts, so far as they were ascertained. But whether it be scientific fact or scientific hypothesis, faith takes it for what it is worth, and in and through it

all lays hold of the great spiritual verities, which are the same in all circumstances: God's eternal existence; God as the originator and sustainer of all other existence; God controlling all things towards a wise and righteous end; God subordinating all things to the well-being of those whom He has made in His own likeness; God as the God of light, not of darkness, of good, not of evil, of life, not of death.

Such, then, was the vision of the seer concerning the first things. He is not posing as a scientist, but speaking as a prophet. We may neither attempt to find detailed agreement between his descriptions and present-day theories; nor interpret his imagery as a literalistic account of the theories of that day. He uses his material freely, as befits a poem. What he would set forth is the spiritual interpretation of nature—of creation. Thus he bids us join him in beholding a sevenfold cycle of creative phenomena, disposed as best suits his purpose, that it may become to us a glorious Divine epiphany. And one great purpose of this epiphany is to teach us a lesson of immortal hope. Just as, at the first beginning, he reveals the primal darkness melting into golden dawn, so at each successive stage of his representation of God's creative wonder-working he bids us behold the same alternation, and in that same order: evening—night—morning. As though he would say, anticipating the whole course of redeeming grace, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all"; bidding us so believe, that we may be children of light, children of the day.

II.

Let us now consider the significance of this saying in regard to human experience, and human destiny.

In the first place, a life without God is compelled, sooner or later, to invert the oracle, and say, "There was morning, and there was evening."

What are the indisputable facts of such a life? Take it at its best, at its brightest. Portray to yourselves, or recall from your own experience, the high hopes, the golden dreams, the fair promise, with which the world greets its favourites as they set forth on their pilgrimage through the happy years. Life's morning 'breaks without a cloud. They pass beneath fair skies along a flowery pathway. For them are the sportive sunbeams, and the songs of birds, and the honeyed hours. All life's issues are touched with success, and turned to pleasantness. Desire is gratified, hopes are fulfilled, dreams become happy realities. Yes, life is enough; the poets cannot make it seem too beautiful; the heart's happy instincts do not deceive. It is one long morning, still aglow with the iridescence of the dawn, and clothed with light as with a garment. All nature, all life's magic fortune, and our own souls, bid us be glad.

But is this all the story, even of these children of fortune, these children of the day? They themselves know better, if only they dare face the truth. Granting that these favoured ones—who are in any case only the favoured few—trip along the pathway gaily to the end; that the sunlight lingers, that the air is still full of song, that friends are many and sorrows far away: we yet must say, if we would be true to the certainties of life, "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun. Yea, if a man live many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity." What is it that cometh? The end! Yes, the end to which all the myriads of gay pleasure-

seekers in past ages have come long ago; the end which no proudest potentate, no many-millions man of wealth, no most successful wooer of fortune, can evade or escape: dismal death, and the dark grave. "Because man goeth to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets: the silver cord is loosed, the golden bowl is broken, the pitcher is broken at the fountain, the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returneth to the earth as it was. Vanity of vanities; all is vanity." There was morning — bright, brilliant, long-continued morning; there was the happy, golden day: but at last, however long delayed, there were the evening shadows; and then—deep, dark, hopeless night.

Such, however, is the fairest and most favourable picture of life without God. This is the rare exception. These lives of prolonged exemption from disappointment and trouble are but few. They are phenomenal in their blithe carelessness, and the sudden night at last, unforetokened, is all the more full of horror because of the contrast. More usually, the sky becomes quickly overcast; there comes a surprise of sorrow; disappointments multiply; at last sorrow becomes familiar. And to some—though they again are the few—life is all gloom; affliction darkens every passing day; death shoots its premonitory shadow athwart all the years. But, taking life generally, as *lived* apart from the grace of God and the sure hope through Christ, we have to write over it the tragic record of loss, sorrow, despair. Uttered or unexpressed, there must be the wail at last, "Who shall show us any good?" For such life, at its worst, at its average, or at its best, the watchword of the Hebrew seer must in every case be reversed, "It was morning—evening—night."

What is the philosophy of such a life? Once it

may have been epicureanism; but, with individual recrudescence here and there, that gay philosophy of life has broken down beneath life's hard facts, and the stubborn pressure of evil fate, and it is superseded in our day by pessimism: pessimism naked and unashamed, which speaks grimly of the worst of all possible worlds; or an optimism which is only pessimism in disguise, like the plausible humanitarianism, which bids man virtually worship himself, and live on the hope of immortality by proxy. Yes, the philosophy of the world, in so far as the world has leisure enough, or is sufficiently serious, to philosophize, is still the reversed watch-word, "Morning—evening—night."

But God, in Christ, has taught us better things; even as it was rung out long ago, as having been inwrought into the very structure of the world from the beginning, "There was evening and there was morning, one day."

Yes, look once more at the vision of the seer, as he shows us, by anticipation, the intended history of a human life, and of man's larger world, redeemed from its sin and emptiness unto God. We behold a world, shrouded indeed in gloom, all disordered and vain. But over it God's compassion broods patiently, until the darkness breaks, the twilight broadens, the dawn brightens gloriously, and at last it is perfect day. That progress, from the partial to the perfect, for such a world as ours, a world ruined by sin but redeemed by grace, is God's Day. It is rehearsed in each individual life upon which that grace does its work; it is being fulfilled, as the ages pass, in the history of our race; and at last the day in which is no darkness at all shall have fully come. Yes, the rehearsals may be in part; even as, in the vision of the seer, morning passed into evening again, and

evening once more into night. But the fulfilment shall be perfect; just as, in the vision, there came at last a sabbatic day that darkened to no night. For so is it declared, in those glowing visions of the last things that are the counterpart to this inspired poem of the world's origins, and of life's beginnings: "there shall be night no more" (Rev. xxii. 5).

Is not this true to the history of God's dealings with men, and to the experience of those who, by faith, have entered personally into the meaning of His redeeming grace? What was the history of the old covenant, but a history of growing hope? There was night; but God was ever setting men's faces towards the dawn, and telling them of the coming day. "One calleth unto me, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh!" Then, in an undertone, for the warning of those who would still be unheeding of God's call, "*and also the night*"—a night so much the deeper and darker, because of the forfeited day. But, to all true, earnest hearts, wrapped about still in the shades of night, the cry rang out triumphantly, "The morning cometh!" Almost the last word of Old Testament prophecy, to those who were still peering through the darkness of the long-drawn night, was a prophecy of sunrise (Mal. iv. 2). Then, in the fulness of time, the sun rose, bringing in the glad day. "The people that sat in darkness saw a great light, and to them that sat in the region and shadow of death, to them did light spring up" (Matt. iv. 16). For there was at last One who, walking Himself in a light that no darkness of the world could quench, said, and is still saying, in words that fulfil themselves more and more, "I am the Light of the world"; and so the world's darkened orb is rolling into the perfect day of God's redemption.

Is not this equally true of our individual experience, in proportion as we humbly and earnestly believe and love? In that case, there come indeed to us, as to others, experiences of loss, of sorrow, of what, but for the better hope, would be despair. But whereas "the sorrow of the world worketh death," yet for those who have "tasted of the heavenly gift" there is such a transforming of these experiences, that, though there is still the darkness of this world's night, it is a darkness already palpitating with the promise of the daybreak. "Seeing it is God, that said, Light shall shine out of darkness, who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. iv. 6). For our redeemed world, we may well "reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed" (Rom. viii. 18); even as for ourselves "we know that all things work together for good." And at last we shall find it fully true, "There was evening and there was morning, one day."

So out of life the splendour dies;
So darken all the happy skies;
So gathers twilight cold and stern:
But overhead the planets burn!
And up the East another day
Shall chase the bitter dark away:
What though our eyes with tears be wet?
The sunrise never failed us yet.

THE GIFT OF THE MORNING STAR

“And I will give him the morning star.”—REV. ii. 28.

It is natural for those who are harassed and weary with the conflict, and even for others who apprehend and dread it from afar, to wish for exemption from the ordeal of battle, or from its further continuance. But “what we win and hold is through some strife.” Heroes are made and proved only in warfare. Whatever there is of worth in human souls is fashioned, and made more worthy, by the shock of opposition, and by the testings of manifold conflict.

Thus we find that the Lord of the Churches speaks like the commander of a campaign. His people are marshalled in face of the foe. He praises His faithful ones, who have borne testimony even to the death; and He says to others, that they may emulate such heroism, “Ye shall have tribulation: be faithful.” And in like manner, though He promises glorious things, the promises are only “to him that overcometh.” It is after the darkest and chilliest night-hour that there is the shining of the bright, the morning star. “He that hath an ear, let him hear.”

I.

“I will give him the morning star.” This is a promise of purity.

There are various sorts and qualities of pureness in life that need distinguishing. First of all, there is the innocence of childhood. Nothing in the world is sweeter than this innocence. It is like the fair, delicate bloom of the tree in spring. We look back regretfully to the forfeited innocence of the past; we think half enviously of the young innocent lives that are growing up around us to-day. With such an emblem before His eyes, was it any wonder that our Lord should point the disciples to this innocence, as He said, "Except ye become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven"? And again He said, with the children clinging about Him, "to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven." But He spoke only of an emblem. Not children, as such, but the spiritually childlike, were the inheritors of the kingdom. For the innocence of childhood is not true purity. It is that which knows not evil, not that which has withstood the evil. It does not withstand; for it has not the strength. The pureness of childhood is like the pureness of the newly fallen snow. Yes, and like the snow, when the traffic of the world has passed over it; for soon enough does childhood's innocence become soiled.

Again, the exuberant activity of youth, while it has its own peculiar temptations, may be exempt, for a while, from certain of the grosser vices, by reason of the very rush of its energy. It is like the merry brook, that casts its pollutions down by the bounding swiftness of its current. But let there come stagnation, and what was the blithe, clear, sparkling stream spreads out into an evil swamp. There is no real purity in youth's buoyant activity.

In later years, also, there may come freedom from certain temptations that in other circumstances are very pressing and perilous, and the character, pro-

fitting by this immunity, may seem pure—like the clear water of a deep, still well. But, just as the stirring of that still water, so seeming pure, will in a moment becloud its clearness, so, when evil suggestion comes at last to the long untempted soul, at once there may be stirred up from the hidden depths ill thoughts and ill desires that bring to nought its seeming pureness. Thus, in all these cases, we see that immunity from temptation is no synonym for purity.

The morning star—could we find a more fitting symbol of the true purity that is to be one of the permanent rewards of faith, and faithfulness? How sweetly, divinely pure is its tremulous beam! It is a pureness of the heavens, to which the things of earth can furnish no real counterpart. And who knows to what processes of convulsion and scathing ordeal in the far past it owes its present inimitable purity? Such is the light which Christ sets on the forehead, breast, and feet of His pilgrims; the light of Him of whom it is written, "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all"; of Him also who said, "I am the Light of the world," even as He said at last, "I am the bright, the Morning Star." Of these children of light it is true, "To the pure all things are pure"; for the light repudiates all darkness. And these are the blessed ones concerning whom Jesus said, "They shall see God."

II.

"I will give him the morning star." This promise speaks of the beauty of holiness.

There is a pureness which is cold and unlovely—the pureness which has its being in mere resistance of evil. This, we may assume, will be but partial,

for where so many avenues of approach are open to the soul, while some are being guarded, evil is likely to enter by other unsuspected means of access. But even if the resistance to evil were complete, the resulting purity would be but the pureness of negation, and a negative purity has no guarantee of permanence. Indeed, the very emptiness of such a life is a standing invitation to the subtle forces of sin to find entrance. This is the house "empty, swept, and garnished" of our Lord's parable, from which the unclean spirit is gone out, but to which at last he returns, with "seven other spirits more evil than himself: and the last state of that man cometh worse than the first" (Matt. xii. 43-45). A negative purity, therefore, is very insecure, as well as cold and unlovely. It needs positive contents, both to make it strong, and to render it attractive to others. A life which is a mere embodiment of "I will not" has the death-warrant in itself; for no one can live on protestation. And a life which to others is ever saying "Thou shalt not," though it may compel a certain wondering awe, can never really attract; for no enthusiasm is kindled by mere prohibition.

The pureness of white light is not the pureness of negation, and it is anything but cold. Indeed, it is heat at its hottest which makes it white. And this whiteness is the whiteness of inclusion, not of exclusion. It is the riches of its contents, its positive worth, by which it subsists in its unsullied purity. All the beauty of the many-coloured rainbow, all the enchantments of the glorious dawn, are in one beam of pure white light. Such is the purity of Christ; and such the purity which Christ gives to His victors. It is its intrinsic loveliness which shuts out all intruding evil. Just as the exquisite colour-

ings of the spectrum blend in the white light in which is no darkness at all; so the presence and blending of all good and true desires—uniting in the perfect love of Christ—make ill desires impossible. This is the deep significance of that advice of the apostle to his Philippian people: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (iv. 8). And Peter teaches the same secret, when he speaks of “Him that called us by His own glory and virtue”—the glorious beauty of His Divine holiness; and tells us that we “may become partakers of the Divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust,” through the positive power of “His precious and exceeding great promises” (2 Pet. i. 3, 4). In pursuance of which result, he bids us follow the tireless quest of the good, adding gain to gain; for so, he says, we shall never fall.

The morning star—fit emblem of that true goodness of the saints of Christ, which is never austere, though always stainless; which, knowing no possibility of compromise with evil, is yet ever winsomely gracious. And, just as the white light of heaven unfolds all its riches of beauty in days of cloud and storm, so do the world’s trial and tempest serve but to make manifest the true graces of character in those that have the mind of Christ.

III.

“I will give him the morning star.” This is the promise of serenity.

There may be a seeming serenity, which has no worth, no real significance. Such is the serenity of inertia. How impressive is the massive stillness of the Pyramids, that have stood unmoved through all the tempestuous changes of history; or of the Sphinx, that has looked out with the same inscrutable gaze to the far away horizon, while millenniums have come and gone! But this apparent tranquillity is an illusion. It is only the crass immobility of vast bulk and weight that gives the impression of undisturbable repose. Merely to be inert is not to be at rest.

Then, again, there is the seeming serenity of abnegation. Of this we have a familiar instance in the case of the Stoics, whose creed protested the unreality of both pleasure and pain, and who practised a studied indifference to these contrasted disturbances of the tranquillity that should characterize the truly wise man. But to steel the sensibilities of our nature against the appeals of outward conditions, until we have acquired a measure of indifference to those things by which most men are so greatly affected, is not to have attained to true restfulness of spirit. Peace comes by gain, not by loss. True self-denial is something very different from this attempted repression of the primary instincts of our nature. And whereas the one may be an important means to the attainment of peace, the other is little better than a partial suicide, and should have its logical conclusion in the unfeelingness of extinction.

In contrast to these mere semblances of serenity is the strong, positive calm of a victorious confidence, the serenity of faith. Not inertness, but the command of great possibilities; and not the abnegation of our nature, but assured sovereignty

over vast resources—in these is the secret of true restfulness. A few years ago, by the slow-flowing Nile, across monotonous desert land, and under the changeless Egyptian sky, a small but highly efficient army was making its way to the place of Gordon's grave, to overthrow the infamous tyranny that was blighting those far regions. Not the immemorial sameness of the landscape, and not the age-long sleep of those cities of the dead by which the expedition passed, but rather the calm confidence of the general and his fighting men, the sense of the resistless energy-in-hand of Kitchener's army—this was the best representation of true tranquillity, as the tranquillity of strength.

It is the same lesson that we are taught by the imagery of the text. For there is a mighty, an almost immeasurable, energy in the tranquil beam of the morning star. Placid indeed it seems, as it glides gently across the immense abysses of space. But what vast potency is in that quiet bridging of the abyss! Scarcely anything that we know of can be compared, for contained strength, with a peaceful ray of morning light. Could we but scrutinize it closely, it quivers with its millionfold energy. When its blended rays are opened out into their many-coloured glory, it is found that of those of the lowest amount of energy—the red rays—the number of vibrations is four hundred and fifty-one billions a second; while the violet rays vibrate no fewer than seven hundred and eighty-five billion times. These numbers are, of course, altogether beyond our grasp. But they serve at least to remind us that the tranquillity of light is the tranquillity of enormous energy in reserve.

So is it with the serenity of spiritual faith. "For we who have believed do enter into that rest" (Heb.

iv. 3). But the faith that is the secret of spiritual restfulness is such faith as inspired those heroes of God concerning whom it is written, that they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, waxed mighty in war, turned to flight armies of aliens" (xi. 33, 34). Or, as it is written in another place, "This is the victory that hath overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John v. 4).

Moreover, just as this faith, which brings the possession of peace, is a faith that is thereafter strong to conquer, so has it sometimes to fight its way to the same tranquil, conquering strength. Of many a one who has afterwards been quietly assured of God, and has thus entered into God's rest, it has been true:—

He fought his doubts and gather'd strength,
He would not make his judgment blind;
He faced the spectres of the mind
And laid them: thus he came at length

To find a stronger faith his own;
And Power was with him.

Thus shall "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

IV.

"I will give him the morning star." This promise tells of a quenchless hope.

We seem to see some traveller of the night, urging his way, onward and upward, though weary with long travel, and still contending with the night-storm. The hours darken at last to the dawn; until

by and by, across the gloom, shines out the cheerful, steady ray of the morning star, day's harbinger. It means that soon the morning will break, and the shadows flee away. It is the symbol of that sure and certain hope which ever nerves Christ's faithful ones to new enterprise, and inspires them with the strength of victory. "For in hope were we saved. But hope that is seen is not hope: for who hopeth for that which he seeth? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait for it" (Rom. viii. 24, 25). This patience, however, is the strong, glad patience of those who can say, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord, more than watchmen wait for the morning; yea, more than watchmen for the morning" (Ps. cxxx. 5, 6). And at last we hear voices ringing forth the cry, "Now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed. The night is far spent, and the day is at hand" (Rom. xiii. 11, 12). Thus "hope putteth not to shame." The pilgrim people are led often into darkness, but always out of darkness into light. The heavenly hope of Christ's fair, duteous service shall reward, at the last, with its more abundant fulfilment.

He that, ever following her commands,
On, with toil of heart and knees and hands,
Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won
His path upward and prevail'd,
Shall find the toppling crags of duty scaled
Are close upon the shining table-lands
To which our God himself is moon and sun.

"Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the hurt of His people, and healeth the stroke of their wound" (Isa. xxx. 26).

"And I will give him the morning star." Thus does the Lord of Life make promise, to His contending people, of the purity, the beauty, the serenity, and the deathless hope, with which He will reward His conquerors. In the midst of the world's defilement, they shall be undefiled. Being kept from the evil, they shall also make manifest the sevenfold beauty of the life that is wholly devoted to His will. Amid all disturbance and disquietude, their strength of faith shall possess them with an inward peace. And though the day of life passes to its eventide, and darkens into night, through the darkest, loneliest hours they shall be undismayed, looking ever towards the day-dawn. So shall it come to pass that at last the day of God will have fully come; and then it shall be true—yes, true for thee, weak, trembling, but believing one—that "thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord will be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended" (Isa. lx. 20).

Does all this seem beyond your reach, and therefore beyond your reasonable belief? It is indeed in itself the unattainable—as little to be attained by our own sheer determination and grasp, as is the veritable star of the morning to be held and possessed in our small, weak hands. But hearken! He says, "*I will give.*" It is not what we can win for ourselves, but what we are willing to receive from our King, that is the measure of our possibilities. "I will give"—and it is the pierced Hand that holds the promised gift. Who shall measure the possibilities that spring from the Cross, from the shedding of that blood, the laying down of that life? The illimitable blessings of His wondrous love are yours for evermore!

SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?

“If a man die, shall he live again?”—JOB xiv. 14.

THIS is the question of the ages. It is asked speculatively, by those who peer with light-hearted curiosity into the shadow-land beyond the grave. But it is asked in quite another tone by those for whom, because of the bereavements of life, it has become an intensely personal problem. There are times when it is wrung from the soul as a veritable cry of anguish.

“Man dieth, and is laid low: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he?” Thus the sad heart asks, when helpless love has been watching the slow decay of strength, the gradual ebbing away of life, and at last the inevitable end has come. There are haunting doubts that whisper, How can such a life, that has flickered away into the extreme of feebleness before our eyes, and then died quite out, ever know revival, rehabilitation, renewal? Nature seems to have demonstrated the impossibility. “Where is he?” Blank emptiness echoes, “Where?”

“If a man die”: such is the hypothesis of the text. But though a hypothesis as regards any particular man at any supposed moment, it is no hypothesis, it is rather the dreadest certainty, as regards our whole career. What may befall us as the years pass, or how long they may be continued,

none can tell. But that they will end, that our existence, with all its engrossing interests, will pass into total eclipse — who shall gainsay this asseveration, confirmed as it is by the universal experience of all the generations? All that is left to us is to ask, What is the outlook beyond? "Shall he live again?"

I.

They who are qualified, against their own desire, by sore bereavement, for appreciation of the bearings of that question, will know how utter is the blank that comes upon the face of nature, and how void of living interest becomes the world of human society, when those that have been associated with us in the manifold interests of life, and to whom, as to ourselves, nature has spoken with its various voices, suddenly cease from beside us, and are not. Of all that made up our life here, they and their love, their fellowship of interest, and their living sympathy, were incomparably the larger part: indeed, they were all—and, alas, they are gone! What meaning now has the world of nature for us, and what worth has human life?

Yet by the strange and mocking contradictions of existence, though the worlds of nature and of human life seem to have been evacuated of all their value, they both go on their way as if nothing of consequence had happened. In the very moment of our worst desolation, nature may put on her blithest apparel, and trill out her gayest song. And when it seems to us as though all human affairs might properly come to a standstill, men pursue their eager business, or take their careless pleasure, as before. It seems to matter not to them that all

our interests are at an end, and that all our hopes are dead.

But is it altogether so? May not nature and human life be ready with some answer to our questioning, even when they seem to care nothing for our grief? "For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water it will bud, and put forth boughs like a plant." All nature teems with prophesyings of a resurrection. And though analogy, in such a case, is not an irrefutable argument, proceeding, of necessity, but a part of the way that we desire to go, yet its hints and forecasts are full of hope. "From life to death" is indeed one universal law of nature; but equally universal, in one large section of nature, is the law, "From death to life." Nature may speak but in parables, and all parables are but partial; nevertheless, nature's parables of a resurrection life are very precious, and help to answer the question, "Shall he live again?" Even more conclusive is the suggestion that comes to us from the busy world of humankind. What is the consummate product of the world's vital processes, crowning all the long, laborious development of the ages? Is it not human thought, human affection, human character? And what becomes of that costly structure, when the scaffolding is at last removed? Does the true life, so rich in contents, perish with the dissolution of its material framework? The gases, the salts—we know what becomes of them, when the bodily organization fails: even they indeed do not perish, but they do cease to fulfil their former temporary use, and are in readiness for new combinations, new uses. But that

for which they served their purpose—the precious entity that we call a soul, a Living Self, with all its treasure of experience, its nobility, its strength, its tender solitudes of love, and its foretokened possibilities of larger growth and richer fruition—does all that glory perish with the perishing clay? Remember that what we see languishing and dying is but the animal vitality; not at all this rarer essence of the animating soul. And though the dying out of the bodily breath impresses us at the moment, as we watch the sad end, and suggests only thoughts of nothingness; yet, when we have leisure to reflect, and recall what was once our possession, we refuse to believe it possible that such love, such life, can have failed with failing breath.

All this, however, is human reasoning and hope; although we may well believe that such reasonings and hopes are prompted and inspired by God. But what more direct and express answer does God give to our questioning?

Now it is said that the Old Testament is comparatively silent regarding this great doctrine of immortality. So might it be said that the heavens are silent to the dwellers upon earth: they do not obtrude themselves upon our notice. "There is no speech nor language; their voice is not heard." Yet are they always there, in silent majesty, overarching the world with their infinitude. They are too great to be asserting themselves in noisy demonstration. In like manner, there are spiritual truths too great to need much expression; and least of all do they need much proving. Such are the doctrine of God, and the doctrine of man—man made in God's likeness. In the Scriptures they overarch us like the sky, and are too completely taken for granted to allow of

much assertion. Moreover, in further explanation of the comparative silence of the Old Testament on this subject, especially in those parts which deal more particularly with the beginnings of the Hebrew nation, we must remember that, to a people habituated to Egyptian beliefs, nothing would have been more superfluous than any reiteration of the doctrine of immortality, seeing that among the Egyptians this doctrine was altogether overdone, being drawn out into fantastic imaginings, and burdening this present life of duty with its weight of morbid detail. It was quite wholesome, therefore, that the Hebrews should have their attention called off from such undue absorption with this theme, and be summoned to attend to the pressing claims of the present. But this is not to say that the great truth of the permanence of life was ignored. It was still a primal postulate, underlying the whole fabric of their law; for only as there was this tacit reference to destiny could there be any valid insistence upon duty. Yes, the truth is there, undoubted and indubitable; and as law passes on into prophecy, and prophecy inspires the more purely devotional literature of lyric psalmody, that truth shines brighter and brighter.

But far more important than any express reference to this subject, and much more precious than the implicit assumption of the truth of man's immortality, is that whole relationship between God and man, pervading the elder covenant as its vital breath, and declared so impressively, in the words quoted by our Lord, as the very foundation principle of God's dealings with the people, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod. iii. 6). For, as Jesus argues with the Sadducees, "God is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matt. xxii. 32). In other words, if God enters into such

living communion with the souls of men, that He can truly be called their God, this very fact, that man may come face to face with the living God, involves such essential similarity between God and man, and therefore such essential dignity and worth in man's nature, made in the likeness of God, that we cannot think it possible that such life perishes with the fleeting years. But the argument becomes far more forceful in the case of those who yield to God's grace, and enter into His fellowship of love. Is it conceivable, either that He would enter into such fellowship with the creatures of a day, or that, having thus loved and cherished His people, He would at last let them fall into annihilation—which would be virtually His casting away of those whom He had cherished? But "God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God."

Therefore, as Job goes on to say, catching a passing glimpse of this great truth, "Thou wouldest call, and I would answer Thee: Thou wouldest have a desire to the work of Thy hands." And with the same assurance do the psalmists exclaim, "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in Thy presence is fullness of joy"; "I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with beholding Thy form"; "For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death"; "My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever" (xvi. 11, xvii. 15, xlviii. 14, lxxiii. 26).

But how the argument culminates in the Gospel of the New Covenant! In Christ we see, as nowhere else, how much man means to God. "For both He that sanctifieth and they that are sanctified are all of one: for which cause He is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb. ii. 11). Can we think that

He would thus identify Himself with the creatures of a day? The great doctrine of the Incarnation is God's own stupendous answer to all cavillings of those who would either deny or doubt the everlasting value of the soul. And the Redemption for which it prepared, a redemption, "not with corruptible things, but with precious blood" (1 Pet. i. 18, 19)—this simply could not have been, but that the souls, thus redeemed, are in His eyes of inestimable worth. Had we been only "cunning casts in clay," "magnetic mockeries," as some assert, we may venture to say, reverently, that we should not have been worth redeeming.

Here again the argument gathers force, as we consider the case of those who receive, by faith, this great salvation, and thus come into true communion with Jesus Christ. For that He could ever cast them into non-existence is the most inconceivable thing of all. Of these He might well say, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of My hand" (John x. 27, 28). Yes, "the firm foundation of God standeth, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His" (2 Tim. ii. 19). These are "they that are written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. xxi. 27): because He lives, they live. He *must* come again, to claim His own; nay, to depart is to be with Christ (Phil. i. 23). He has risen, that we may rise; He has ascended, as our Forerunner.

II.

The question, however, that presses on our hearts is not so much whether we and our friends survive

death, still existing in some other state of being; as whether we shall be the same to each other then as now, the blessed fellowship of love, that death seems to break, being reconstituted. Indeed, not seldom, though as betraying a singular blindness to the simplest and surest realities of faith, the question has been asked, "Shall we know each other there?" Even eminent theologians, notably one not long since passed away, have spoken of the "absolute silence" of Scripture on this point.

Now, even if Scripture were absolutely silent on this subject, let us say at once that it would matter nothing to our faith. For here again, as in regard to the more general question of immortality, God's love and Christ's redemption are arguments so irrefragable, that it would be no wonder if any express assertions had been regarded as wholly unnecessary for believing hearts. This, in brief, is the question: Can God, whose love is so solicitous to secure the greatest happiness and highest good of His people, be supposed capable of depriving them for ever of that which, humanly speaking, was all they cared much for here, namely, the love and blessed fellowship of kindred hearts? and can it be thought that Christ, who came to destroy the works of sin and death, has so failed to accomplish His purpose, that this work of death, this severance from those we love, remains uncanceled? Let those believe these things who can; but surely the love of God in Christ has given us better hope. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?" In this respect it is surely true, that "Christ Jesus abolished death."

But is Scripture so absolutely silent on this subject? Even in the Old Testament there are some

precious sayings that at least point very significantly that way. What is the meaning of the oft-recurring phrase, used of the death of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, in turn, "he was gathered unto his people"? This is no mere euphemism for burial, as must surely be obvious, when we remember that Abraham was laid to rest in a land of strangers; and, moreover, in every case, notably in that of Jacob, the words are used immediately of the death itself, and quite separately from the after-consideration of burial. It may be said that it was a proverbial expression, adopted by the sacred writer; but this only enhances its significance, as testifying to the intuitive assurance of men that—

There every heart rejoins its kindred heart.

But how all-conclusive are the assurances of the Gospel! Even in our Lord's ministry of help, what blessed pre-intimations are afforded of the reunion that He will accomplish at last! The late Dr. John Ker, writing on this subject, says, "In the case of all those who were raised again to life in this world, we find that they were restored to the family circle—the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain, and the brother of Martha and Mary. There was an anxiety, if I may so speak, to surround them with their nearest friends when they opened their eyes again, that the first faces they looked on might be those of kindred—of father, mother, brother, sister." And he asks, concerning these instances, "Do they not shadow out this truth, that God will begin our life again among those we have known and loved, and cause us to open our eyes in the bosom of what we shall feel to be a family and a home, with faces round us that are dear and familiar, and voices, whose tones we know, ready

to reassure us?" If it were not so, as the same writer goes on to say, that would not be "a better resurrection."

"If it were not so"—ah, then, as our Lord says, He would have told us; that is, He would not have left us ignorant of the fact, if, in this all-important respect, next to the supreme joy of His own abiding love and fellowship, the other world, by some mystery of fate, must be inferior to the present. But is this even thinkable? Indeed, on that very occasion, speaking to His disciples, so soon to be bereft, the great, all-comprehensive promise, "In My Father's House are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there ye may be also," all His language being full of the intimations of household fellowship and gladness, we must remember that He was giving this promise to a company of dearest friends, and that the promise would have had no comfort whatever for them, had it not meant that their fellowship with one another, for His sake, would itself be re-constituted in the glad reunion of the Father's House.

It is this same assurance, with the same authority, that the Apostle Paul conveys to certain perplexed mourners among the Thessalonian people, who, having lost their beloved ones, were filled with the wondering doubt, so blighting to their own prospect of immortality in Christ, whether those that were lost would ever be their own again, when he says, "We would not have you ignorant concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are

fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with Him"—
bring to you, and those that have been your dearest
here shall be your dearest for evermore.

Give joy or grief, give ease or pain,
Take life or friends away:
I come to find them all again,
In that eternal day!

THE CHALLENGE OF EASTERTIDE

“Why seek ye the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen.”—LUKE xxiv. 5, 6.

“ON the first day of the week, at early dawn,” came those faithful, but heavy-hearted, women to the sepulchre. But why is it that, in spite of themselves, they already begin to tread more lightly, and a secret thrilling of the soul belies what they know to be the dread fact, that for them the sun of life is blotted out, and that all the hopes of their hearts are dead? A little while ago, when they stood near the cross where their Lord hung dying, all nature passed beneath the gloom of an awful eclipse. It was fitting that the sun should be darkened, and that a sympathetic shudder should move earth’s deepest foundations, at such a sight. But now, as though perversely fickle, all things, in earth beneath and heaven above, seem to be saying, “Rejoice!” Never, surely, was sky brighter and sweeter, nor the air more a-quiver with quiet delight; never did birds sing more blithely, nor the flowers open their eyes with brighter hopefulness; and never were the first colourings of dawn more prophetic of glorious things, than on the morning of this first Easter Day. It was Life—sovereign, conquering, redeeming. Life—that already stirred the universe to new expectations,

although these mourning ones, as yet, knew nothing better than that they were going to a place of death.

They draw near. With one furtive, half-guilty look at Golgotha, that flaunts its skull-like hideousness before their view, they turn into the friendly shelter of the cliff, and enter the garden—the place of the sepulchre. Trying to crush down their tumult of woe, renewed by that spectacle, they nerve themselves for the task that they both desire and dread, and urge their way to the rock-grave.

I.

But what is the meaning of the sight that confronts them there? The great stone that so securely held the entrance to the tomb, and which they had been wondering how they should remove, is rolled away. For not long before, perhaps just as the day was beginning to break, while the Roman soldiers kept their watch before the sealed sepulchre, “an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. His appearance was as lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the watchers did quake, and became as dead men.” And it was a dead story—dead from its very birth—that they retailed, by priestly instruction, in the city: “His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.” For even as they reeled off, parrot-like, these self-contradicting words, there came once more a shuddering dread upon them, which betokened that the power of a great manifestation had overwhelmed those stout-hearted men of war.

The women, however, know nothing of all this that has come to pass, till they enter, reverently,

into the tomb. Here new wonders await them: the tomb is empty! "And it came to pass, while they were perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were affrighted, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the Living One among the dead? He is not here, but is risen!"—a message from the Living One, spoken through these living ones, the angels of life. Can we divine the feelings of the wondering women? What a rush of amaze overpowers them; and then, what a transport of gladness possesses them! They ask no questions; they make no answer; but, with one long look at the heavenly messengers, and one comprehending survey of the tomb, they turn, and leave the place, and hasten to the disciples in Jerusalem, with the startling news, "The Lord is risen!" They themselves are convinced by the indisputable manifestation of life.

On hearing the tidings, Peter and John make haste to the sepulchre, Peter being outstripped by his eager comrade, who, however, not so bold as he is eager, contents himself with peering into the empty grave. But Peter, arriving, presses at once into the tomb, "and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying, and the napkin, that was upon His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, and he saw, and believed." Saw what? Believed what? The old explanation is so poor, that one wonders it held its ground so long. It is said that the orderly appearance of the cerements, folded and neatly laid, convinced the disciples that there had been no theft of the body, for the haste of such an act would not have allowed of this leisurely disrobement. But can

we for one moment suppose that the rising Lord, like Lazarus, would need thus to be loosed of His grave-cloths, ere He could enter upon the freedom of the resurrection life? Surely His body, immediately transformed by the resurrection power into incorruption and immortality—the body which afterwards appeared and disappeared at His will, and which came silently and swiftly into the midst of the disciples, “the doors being shut”—would at once pass out of the linen swathes, leaving them as they were, still shaped as though they held their former contents; and the head napkin, separated by a little space from the rest of the clothing, and still “rolled up” as though holding the head in its repose, would likewise betoken the marvel of the resurrection. For nothing else than a resurrection could explain these strange phenomena. And, at once obliged and glad to believe, but awed by the self-evidencing portents of a life that bade defiance to death, they “went away unto their own home.”

Now follows the most touching episode of all, in this self-evidencing of the Risen One. Mary Magdalene lingers weeping by the tomb, having arrived once more, after Peter and John had left. She has thought but for one thing, as she looks into the empty tomb; and even to the angels, still absorbed in the sense of loss, she says, “They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.” Then turning, and beholding One whom she takes to be the gardener, she says, “Sir, if thou hast borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.” He speaks but one word—her name—and with what a world of tenderness in the old familiar utterance: “Mary.” Does she need more? If for her the tokens of life’s power have not sufficed to prove Him risen, for no

power of resurrection could fill the emptiness in her heart; this proof of the self-same love of the Living One is enough, and nevermore would she need other evidence. Love proves itself; and love proves life.

Was it not the same with the two disciples on the Emmaus journey? Their heart was already burning within them, while He spake to them in the way, and opened to them the Scriptures. And then afterwards, as they were gathered about their simple repast in the Emmaus home, so soon as "He took the bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them," their eyes were opened, and they knew that it was the Lord. Once more life proved itself and under its mighty spell all questions died unasked away. But we may notice, if we will, certain gradations in this self-evidencing of the Living One after the resurrection. The thunder of His power overwhelms the Roman soldiers; the gentler assurances of His messengers suffice to send the timid women away rejoicing; the tokens of the potency of the resurrection process convince the disciples at the tomb; the outgoing of His affection fills Mary's heart full of satisfaction; and now the spiritual sympathy of their unknown Companion attests Him at last to the two Emmaus travellers as the Lord of souls, and therefore Lord of Life. Well might it be asked, as by the angels, "Why seek ye the Living One among the dead?" That Living One had but to make life manifest, and they believed.

And as it was with those that first saw the Lord, and the tokens of His resurrection life, so was it likewise in every other instance of His appearing. When He stood in the midst of the disciples on the evening of that first Easter Day, saying, "Peace be unto you," and they "were glad, when they saw the Lord"; when a second time, the Sunday follow-

ing, He stood in their midst as before, still saying, "Peace be unto you," and Thomas, who had stoutly declared that, without some especial demonstration, he would not believe, nevertheless at once exclaimed, as that Life laid its spell upon his soul, "My Lord and my God"; when He manifested Himself a third time, by the Lake of Galilee, giving swift success to their labours, and then gathering the little company about Him, by that fire on the shore—"and none of the disciples durst inquire of Him, Who art Thou? knowing that it was the Lord"; and when, later still, He showed Himself "to above five hundred brethren at once": in every case alike the one all-comprehending, all-conclusive proof that He was indeed the Living One was the self-evidencing reality of His life itself. And in each case the evidence was more conclusive in proportion as it was the manifestation of soul to soul, rather than any display of wonder to the senses. The higher, the more spiritual, the quality of the life, as it was able to make its appeal to affection and faith, rather than merely to bodily vision or hearing, the truer was the result.

In accordance with this law of evidence—even as John so emphatically expresses it: "*Jesus was manifested to the disciples,*" or, "*manifested Himself*"; which means so much more than that He merely appeared—it is said, as summing up the whole self-evidencing of the Living One during the interval between the resurrection and the ascension, "to whom He also showed himself alive after His passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, *and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God*" (Acts i. 3). There was the visual appearance of the veritable Jesus, clothed with the body which was the same, and yet not the same; there was the irresistible appeal of His living love

to their affection and sympathy; and there was the manifestation of His redeeming grace to their deepening humility and growing faith.

Not essentially different from these instances, though occurring in the years that followed, were His revelation of Himself to Saul of Tarsus, and His manifestation to John on Patmos. In the former case, there was the shining of "a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun," accompanied by a Voice that said, "I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest," but passing into that inward conviction of which he said, "It was the good pleasure of God to reveal His Son *in me*" (Gal. i. 15, 16); and in the latter, the vision of glory, striking the disciple to the ground "as one dead," followed by the tender touch that chased away all fears, and revived the memories of blessed fellowship long ago, as he heard the words, falling indeed audibly upon his ears, but also pervading his whole soul with the power of their attestation, "Fear not: I am the First and the Last, and the Living One; and I was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore." But, with these exceptions, the beholding of the Risen Lord belonged to the past, and, ever since Pentecost, His disciples saw Him with more convincing, because wholly spiritual, vision; so that Pentecost brought the abiding fulfilment of the evidence of Eastertide.

II.

We must now inquire in what corresponding manner the Living One manifests Himself to us, in these latter days, to whom the actual event of the resurrection is historically so remote.

More or less resembling, in its evidential quality, the visual manifestation of Jesus to the first disciples,

is their concurrent testimony to the fact that He was many times seen by them after He was risen from the dead. This testimony is contained in the New Testament Scriptures—indeed, it pervades those Scriptures, as the one all-important truth which alone accounts for their being written. Nor can we conceive any motive at all adequate to the impulsion of the writers to bear such testimony, or any power sufficient to sustain them in such a task, apart from their own living conviction of the reality of His resurrection. No testimony to any event that has ever happened has claims to credence superior to the claims of their testimony to the resurrection of Jesus.

But just as to the disciples themselves the visual evidence, while necessary as the preliminary proof, was quite subordinate in its intrinsic value to those manifestations of Jesus to their affection and faith in which the ocular demonstration merged, and for which it prepared the way; so to us the Scripture, as conveying the testimony of those disciples, while all-important for such a purpose, has, beyond that purpose, a self-evidencing power, as touching the resurrection, the value of which cannot be over-estimated. These writings of the disciples are not merely their writings, nor are they just so much literature. They have a quality which is unique, even as it is of rarest spiritual worth. In proportion as we approach them with reverent mind and earnest heart, we meet God there, as we meet Him nowhere in the literature of the world; and it is God in Christ whom thus we meet there, in such wise that we find ourselves coming into contact and converse with a great Living Personality. Yes, the Risen One has His meeting-place here with disciples to-day, as truly as in Upper Room, or on Olivet, with

disciples long ago, and as truly does He still attest Himself the Living One to the devout, believing soul.

To most of us, however, these Scriptures do not make their appeal alone, but in association with a great spiritual fellowship, by which they have been guarded as a sacred heritage, and also made known to the world in fulfilment of a holy trust. And in the communion of living souls named by His Name, despite all weakening of such attestation because of inconsistency, or of the worse contradiction of those who bear the Name in vain, we find the same living influence as that which appeals to us from the pages of the New Testament; and thus the Lord of the Church, which is so obviously His creation, attests Himself as the Living One, and by means of its communion and fellowship brings us into fuller union with Himself.

Nor ought we to overlook the working and ruling of that same Living One in the general affairs of men. The "King of the Ages" He is called in the Apocalypse (Rev. xv. 3); and has not the course of the ages borne ample testimony to His power? What is the common and ineradicable custom of dating the years from His birth, and stamping them with the familiar lettering A.D., but the acknowledgment of His rulership, and of the superscription of the King? To use once more Richter's often quoted words, "The life of Christ concerns Him who, being the holiest among the mighty, the mightiest among the holy, lifted with His pierced Hand empires off their hinges, and turned the stream of centuries out of its channel, and still governs the ages." And it was His resurrection that stamped upon the world's history, once for all, the indelible distinction between the old and the new; even as there shows to-day so

palpable a demarcation, also, geographically, between heathendom and Christendom.

III.

But, in proper continuity with the living energy and inspiration of the Risen Christ as present in the midst of men to-day, we must consider His relation to those who have gone on, beyond life's bourne, out of our sight, and their consequent relation to ourselves.

This world is a hundredfold fuller of graves than of living people; and in the garden of every life, however fair with flowers and bright with the shining of the sun, there is a sepulchre—a place of buried hopes, of departed sunshine, of affection that has found its term. But never, since He vacated the tomb on that first day of the week, leaving behind all limitations of mortality, and entering on the resurrection life, of such untold possibilities for those that should believe in His Name, has Death spelt out the same dread meaning for His people; nay rather, it is now compelled, by His mastery, to disclose its secret, and show itself transformed: Death, the Gate of Life.

Death is but the portal, of which He holds the key, dark on this side, where we see only the putting out of the lesser lights, as the transition is effected from this earlier stage of our history to the larger years beyond; but, on that side, bright with the glory of the everlasting kingdom. They who follow their Lord of Life along that way, and whose interests all come under the transfiguring touch of the Living One—these are not dead to us, but, for all that truly appertained to them as living souls, they are now finding life more abundantly.

Then, "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Let the perpetual Eastertide of Christ's Resurrection utter this challenge to your unbelief. Harken to Him, you that mourn by your grave-sides for a season, and then, by a contrast that is not altogether a contradiction to the sorrow that buries its past affections in the grave, content yourselves with the practical forgetting of those whom you call dead—hearken, I say, for the rebuking of your hopeless grief, and of your yet more hopeless gaiety, as He says, in the words that Martha of Bethany heard long since, and that still bring their invincibly glad tidings to all that have ears to hear, "I am the Resurrection and the Life: He that believeth on Me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on Me shall never die."

Like Martha, we know, forsooth, of a resurrection at the last day—some sort of survival, far away from these our stricken years, and ineffective for our present succour. No, they *never die*—those whom He takes in the closer grasp of His redeeming grace; and that grasp—how can it possibly kill the living bond between their souls and ours? He can kill nothing that is good; but He rather makes more living, more vital, He makes immortal, that which, to our purblind vision, death seemed to destroy. Believe, then, and live by the belief, that they are yours, not less but more truly, because they, at least, have now looked the Living One fully in the eyes, and evermore hear Him say, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

"Why seek ye the living among the dead?" Yet these are they of whom we always speak in the past tense, saying of such a one, "He was my friend." Enumerating our families, we do these the injustice of omitting them from the reckoning—and this in

spite of the acknowledged verity of Wordsworth's little maid, who still would say, "Nay, we are seven." *They* have not broken the bonds of union; nor, we may be sure, have those bonds been broken by the Lord of Love: why, then, should *we* persist in breaking them, and then speak regretfully of broken bonds? We seek our living ones, by these futile regrets, among the memories of past years; and then again we make a virtue of forgetting our griefs—and our friends. Let us rather be consistent with the high hopes of the Gospel. Let us have fuller trust in God's large redeeming love, and a more vivid realization of the range of Christ's resurrection power. As "all live unto Him," so let us think of them as still living for us, and with us, although for a brief season we see them not. And though the very fulness of our Christian hope forbids that we any longer pray in their behalf, yet it not only does not forbid, but rather claims, that we do not cease to make mention of them in our prayers, giving thanks for them, praising God for their victory, and asking that we may be counted worthy "to attain," with them, "unto the resurrection from the dead."

Thus shall we be able to say, with the full assurance of those that have proved it true through the whole range of this living hope, "The Lord is risen indeed."

King of Glory! Soul of bliss!
 Everlasting life is this:
 Thee to know, Thy power to prove,
 Thus to sing, and thus to love.

NONE OF YOU ASKETH, WHITHER?

“But now I go unto Him that sent Me; and none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?”—JOHN xvi. 5.

“Whither as a Forerunner Jesus entered for us.”—HEB. vi. 20.

ONE of the most sorrowful reflections in every serious life is that there have been so many lost opportunities. Nor could the disciples, in their after years, fail to think regretfully of the many precious opportunities, in the companionship and converse of Jesus, which by their carelessness they had forfeited. They had been slow to appreciate the deeper import of His mission and ministry; they neglected at last to enter with true sympathy into the dread meaning of His passion; and, in this tender, last farewell, they were either too dazed or too distracted to ask questions such as He was waiting to answer, but which, for their want of thought, were to go unasked and unanswered till it was too late.

“Because I have spoken these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart”: thus does the pain of the imminent parting overwhelm their higher hopes. There was to be a breaking of their blessed fellowship. The sweet, glad years had come to an end, and they must step forth on their sorrowful way alone. Dimly they forecast the future—it

shall surely be all opprest, bereft, and desolate. Thus are they held in the cramping bonds of a partnership of grief. But has the future only one aspect? Is it to be all loss, pain, death? Their Master is passing into the cloud; but shall He not pass beyond the cloud? They must follow into the darkness; but shall they not also follow into the light? And is not the one transient, the other enduring? Should they not therefore forget the temporary darkening of their path, for very joy of the abounding hope? Then should they be banded together, with one another and with their Lord, in the lasting partnership of gladness, strength, and victory.

I.

One question which it was so obviously their interest to ask at this last season of intercourse, when He was about to pass from their midst, was the question, "Whither?"

Ah, is not that the question of questions for us pilgrims through the mortal years? We journey on, willing or unwilling; we are daily nearing the end; our friends, pressing on before us, pass out of our sight: but whither? What is the nature of the mysterious beyond, the life after life—after death? Sometimes, sore with the cruel rendings of death, left lonely on our way, and thinking wistfully of those who have gone, we ask, with aching hearts and streaming eyes, "Whither?" And we think, could some one but return from the mystery to tell us what it means, we would wait, we would be patient, brave, and strong. Such an opportunity—how we should prize it, and how much we should make of it! Yet here was an opportunity unspeakably more precious, and it was lost! For they were

speaking familiarly with One who knew all, and would gladly tell them much. He was passing on, not to a mystery, not to an unknown country, but to His native place, His Fatherland. He was truly going home. He came from heaven, and to heaven returned. Even while here in the world, He lived and had His being in that other world—"the Son of Man, who is in heaven" (John iii. 13). "But . . . none of you asketh Me, Whither goest Thou?"

Would they ever forgive themselves, that they had had that opportunity to ask, had been encouraged to ask, and yet had failed to ask? The golden opportunity was lost—but not wholly. Had it been so, the loss would have been too irreparable; and irreparable for the world, as well as for themselves. He is too considerate, too forbearing, too sedulous for their own instruction and encouragement, to allow them to be so entirely the losers because of their mistake. Therefore, though there could not be any express answer to an unasked question, there are, during this last intercourse, hints and suggestions concerning the great future, which, though falling perhaps at the time on almost unheeding ears, would in after days come to remembrance, and disclose their wealth of meaning.

Nor was this all the answer to the great question, "Whither?" Jesus, as Son of Man, is at once our Pattern of duty and our Exemplar of destiny. In all things He was "made like unto His brethren." Not only, then, by sharing our lot here, but by foretokening our condition there, in that larger life, does He truly represent His people. "Whither as a Forerunner Jesus entered—for us": that He might thus show beforehand, as by a great object-lesson, what is the character of that life beyond death, concern-

ing which we would fain ask, if we might, so many questions. Thus, in the account of His Ascension, there are hints and suggestions, as well as in His own instruction at the last gathering in the Upper Room, which amply answer the question, "Whither?"—at least to those who listen with prepared minds and hearts.

For this is one great advantage of the suggested, rather than expressly formulated, reply to such questioning, that it unfolds its significance just when we need it most. Words that we may have passed over, a hundred times, in our reading, without divining their deeper import, become all at once, in some great emergency of our life, fraught with wondrous revelation. Yes, it is as though just then the veil were lifted, and to us, individually, for our own especial help and inspiration, were made known a truth, which from that very time forth becomes our own possession. But ought we to speak thus hypothetically? Is not the revealing Spirit doubly a Revealer? He has revealed the truth once for all in the written word; He makes that written word a word spoken—by Spirit to spirit—with immediate, living power. This was the meaning of our Lord's words, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He shall guide you into all the truth. He shall glorify Me: for He shall take of Mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John xvi. 12-14). For so is it true that revelation, while complete and final for the world, is for the individual believer ever developing new and more fruitful contents; especially in regard to the great problems that constrain us to ask, of those who pass away beyond our vision, "Whither?" even as our Lord said, in that same declaration con-

cerning the revealing Spirit, "He shall declare unto you the things that are to come."

II.

"Now I go unto Him that sent Me": this word was to be fulfilled immediately, when on the cross He should commend His spirit to the Father; and it was to find a further, and more signal, fulfilment when He should ascend from His disciples into heaven. What, then, do we learn from the suggestions of this farewell intercourse, and from the hints of the last parting, in answer to the question, "Whither goest Thou?"

We learn, first, that He was about to pass into a realm of more abundant life. Let us take our place, in imagination, among the little company on Mount Olivet. We are with One who is already on the far side of death. As for our own dearest, if they pass on before, we can only accompany them to the entrance of death's narrow passage. We watch their "decease"—their departure, or exodus, from the world—among the shadows, and in lingering feebleness. This we have learned to call death. It is the dying down of our present life's vitality, the waning of its vigour. They loose their hold on the world, and no longer have any possession or tenure here. What may be beyond we can but imagine, hope, believe. But what was beyond, in His case, we are not left to conjecture: we see and know. We behold Him on the other side of death's dark passage; and lo, the shadows are all left behind, the feebleness is forgotten, His human nature has found its emancipation, its permanent transfiguration. He has entered into the fuller life, and He is passing to His glory.

As we stand there, behold, the invisible world lays bare its splendour !

All heaven bursts her starry floors,
And strows her lights below.

And lo, from the opening sky down to the earth, and from the earth up to the opened heavens, the angels of life attend to welcome and escort the Lord of Life. But we are overpowered. "No mortal eye can bear the sight." Thus the vision passes; the King of Glory enters on His proper heritage; death is swallowed up in victory.

Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension
We by faith behold our own.

"Whither as a Forerunner Jesus entered—for us." He is our Harbinger; the Firstborn among many brethren. There awaits us also, after death, a realm of boundless life. That is no shadow-land, no place of pallid ghosts, no world of vague and vapid monotony. We shall find, one day, that this present world, with all its proud achievements and noisy doings, was but the infancy of our existence, and that these things, at their best and bravest, were only child's play in comparison with "the full-grown energies of heaven."

It is in keeping with these signs of an unimaginable plenitude of life, as awaiting those who pass hence along the pathway of their Lord, that already, by anticipation, there is imparted to them the strength of the eternal victory. "Ye shall receive power," were the words that He spoke, even as He parted from them; and in the Upper Room, foretelling the conflict, He had assured them of conquest in His Name. "In the world ye have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."

We learn, likewise, that the realm of more abundant life is a realm of love. Had He not said, again and again, "I go to the Father"? He wondered that they did not share His joy. It was His home-going. A wistful longing for the Father's House mingled with His yearning towards the disciples, who were to be left behind. The Father's House—that is the centre of all fellowship, the shelter of all affection, the place towards which all true hearts ever tend, and in which is found the fulfilment and fruition of all loyal love. And the love that is there—even the self-sufficing love of the Father and the Son—yearns for all love; it cannot be content with separation and absence; it can brook no incompleteness of the heavenly fellowship. Therefore, even as He passes to the Father, His hands are lifted towards the disciples, His loving regard is fixed upon them, and so long as He is within their hearing He continues to speak words of gracious benediction. Moreover, there is left with them, that they may not abide in heavy-hearted grief, the tender promise of a return.

Thus love awaited them there, and love lingered with them here. It was to be the crown of their rejoicing at last, and it should be their present inspiration. For had He not said, "Because I live, ye shall live also"? and then, defining more precisely the life "hid with Christ in God," He went on to say, "In that day ye shall know that I am in My Father, and ye in Me, and I in you." So should their joy, even in this thwarting, contradicting world, be made full.

III.

If, then, there awaits us beyond death, as believers in Jesus, that realm of boundless life and love into

which He entered as our Forerunner, what does this mean, more precisely, in its relation to the present life, with its manifold interests, and, most of all, its true affections and friendships?

We are taught, for one thing, the abiding value of human faculty. Our faculties here are practised, that there they may come to their perfect exercise and use. This doctrine of the continuity of life should warn us that we guard with jealous care, and train with unremitting vigilance, every power and aptitude with which we are endowed, and with which, either well or ill trained, and therefore either at an advantage or at a disadvantage, we shall enter upon that fuller life.

This is the larger outlook that is given to the observance of the psalmist in the Epistle to the Hebrews. "For not unto angels did He subject the world to come, whereof we speak. But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that Thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of Thy hands: Thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that He subjected all things unto him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we see not yet all things subjected to him." (See ii. 5-8.) In other words, man's lordship over this world is but partial, and, though it grows from more to more, not until "the times of restoration of all things" will it be perfected. Meanwhile Jesus, the great archetypal Man, has achieved the lordship even over death, treading sin beneath His feet; and those who range themselves under His leadership, as their Captain of salvation, He will introduce at last into their glorious inherit-

ance. Then shall they come to their mastery. The present power of holiness is the pledge of all power. But that power will be wrought out by means of the very faculties that are now exercising themselves for such high service and enterprise.

Science, art, plastic skill—what we know by such names here is but the faint adumbration of the possibilities of that hereafter. "The powers of the age to come" we do but taste in this world (Heb. vi. 5); in that world they shall make their full display, and accomplish their full purpose.

We are taught, in the next place, the abiding value of human friendship. If we believe in the continuity of life, then surely we must believe in the continuity of love. Are the faculties of this life germinal of the fully developed faculties of the perfect life? Then must the friendships of this world be prophetic of the consummated friendships of the world to come. It has been well said, that 'one chief use of this life is to form friendships for the next.' If only we believed it, if we lived by this faith, if in the Name of our all-conquering Christ we dared to defy the undoings and destructions of death, what wholesomeness, what tenacity, what ennoblement would come to the loves that now we so easily allow death to make sport with, and which therefore so often present but a pitiful show at last, after all the bravery and proud pretensions of their beginning. Do you say you would fain have this possession, but that the silences of the Gospel, as well as the unbeliefs of men, keep you back from such full assurance of faith? So you ask timorous questions of your own fearful heart, and to Jesus Himself, the very Abolisher of Death, you go with your like untrustful questionings. But in so far as the Scripture is chary of express statements, it is in

order that by its very silence it may the more effectually appeal to our faith. For, in proportion as we do truly believe in a living God of love, we shall never dream of suspecting that He will be jealous of the perfecting of our loves. And in proportion as we estimate the scope and efficacy of Christ's redemption, we shall not doubt that all sin's misdeeds shall be undone, even to the farthest reach of their baneful influence, in behalf of those for whom His own very life was given. "In that day ye shall ask Me no question"—of curious, doubting wonderment: for His people shall be so sure of His love, that whatever their own true love craves they will be sure He will give. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, If ye shall ask anything of the Father, He will give it you in My name. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be made full." Wherefore comfort thy aching heart, thou sorrowing one, and say—

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still
 Will lead me on,
 O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till
 The night is gone;
 And with the morn those angel faces smile,
 Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.

THE ABIDING CHRIST

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever.”—HEB. xiii. 8.

To the writer and his readers, there were many voices that spoke solemnly and impressively of change. Things that had been familiar were passing away. Those who had been wise and strong as leaders and rulers of souls were gone. Sometimes it seemed as though the whole visible framework of life were being shaken to its overthrow. Therefore he bids them cleave the more jealously to the things which cannot be shaken—which abide for ever.

In those times, the convulsions and calamities incident to political upheaval, as well as the ruthlessness of bitter persecution, emphasized the changefulness and uncertainty of life. But even in quieter years there are not wanting tokens, that multiply as life goes onward to its close, reminding us how precarious is our tenure of the things we prize the most. We have to submit to the severance of old and close associations; and even the more sacred and spiritual bonds of life are loosed. Nature fails, and all that is bound up with the natural sooner or later gives way. But there is a strong Divine reality which endures; and when other things suffer shock, it is that we may make our surer refuge in the Divine.

To ourselves, then, as well as to those people of a

far-off age; there may well come the cautionary reminders that we should live free from the inordinate love of this world's wealth, and content ourselves with whatever lot God's providence may appoint: "for Himself hath said, I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee." This being so, we shall have the good courage of those who fear not the wrath of man, and are not dismayed because of loss, failure, or death; for the Lord is our Helper, and our portion evermore.

The Hebrew Christians to whom these words were addressed had hung upon the messages of men who watched for their souls; the living example, also, of their leaders had been a constant incentive to well-doing, and the faith which shone in their whole life, and breathed through all their words, had been an inspiration. Now they were bereft. Yet not bereft; for He in whom they had thus been taught to believe, who was the end and aim of those faithful ministrations, was the same—"the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever."

Nor, though since then the weary ages have rolled away, have His years failed; but though all things else are in ceaseless fluctuation and change, He abides. Yesterday or to-day, to-day or henceforth, He is the abiding Teacher, Saviour, Friend.

I.

Let us then consider carefully this triple fulfilment of human need by Jesus Christ.

First, Jesus Christ is our Teacher.

It is natural to the human mind to hunger for the truth. This desire is strong or weak, in proportion to the general alertness of the mind, or its lassitude; and in proportion as the intellectual faculties are not

kept in abeyance by the indulging of appetite, or made merely tributary to selfish ends, whether of gain or of pleasure. In the case of those who are more serious and earnest, in whom conscience holds its proper place, and speaks with its full force, this general desire to know becomes more especially a craving to know what is right, to learn the truth of duty. And where the soul is touched to yet finer issues by the Spirit of God, this longing becomes still more defined and intensely personal: "that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, becoming conformed unto His death; if by any means I may attain unto the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. iii. 10, 11).

This need of the human mind is fully met by Jesus Christ. "Jesus went about . . . teaching": so does Matthew describe our Lord's opening ministry (iv. 23). "Seeing the multitudes, He went up into the mountain: and He opened His mouth, and taught them" (v. 1). But did not such work fill all the busy days? "The Teacher" was perhaps His most familiar designation. Moreover, the truths that He taught were truths of duty. With a sure hand, He delineated the great principles of conduct and character, as they have never else been made known among men. Over the portals of the kingdom of heaven He inscribed the Beatitudes, sparkling as with all manner of precious stones; and He pointed the people to the straitened way of righteousness, as "the way that leadeth unto life." But, in His teaching, the way of righteousness was ever the way of faith. He taught men that only by trusting and loving God could they become truly good. Thus He met the spiritual hunger of the mind by speaking to them of the kingdom of God.

At last, gathering up into one weighty word all this significance of His ministry, and expressing besides the essential significance of Himself, as being One whom most of all it concerned men to know, He said, "I am the Truth."

Again, Jesus Christ is our Saviour.

Deeper and more fundamental than the need of knowledge is the need of salvation. If the mind craves for truth, so does the conscience, either clamorously or mutely, cry for appeasement and cleansing. Indeed, in proportion as we learn the law of righteousness, do we learn how far we have gone astray from the way of God's will, and how grievously we have broken His commands. The more clearly we discern the beauty of holiness, and the sacredness of God's claims upon our trust and love, the more are we convicted of our alienation from God by an evil heart of unbelief. Nor is the evil an evil which it is within our own power to remedy. We cannot, by ever so little, undo the guilt of the past; nor can we loose ourselves from the present bondage of the soul to sin's tyrannous power. Our utmost struggling does but bring home to us the fact that we are hopelessly undone and lost. We need a Divine salvation.

This need, above all, is met by Jesus Christ. More important than the teaching was the preaching of Jesus Christ, and He preached Himself as the Saviour. Listen to His manifesto as made known to His fellow-townsmen of Nazareth. "He opened the book, and found the place where it was written,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me,
Because He anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor :
He hath sent Me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

And He began to say unto them, To-day hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears" (Luke iv. 17-21). His wonderful works among the people were an object-lesson of His power to save. He came among them everywhere as the Healer and Helper, and they felt that a new power of God was in their midst, laying itself alongside their sin and misery, bringing truest sympathy and strong salvation. Let them be ever so outcast and abandoned, He brought to their despair so great a hope, and did so melt them into contrite shame by the Divine pity and purity of His love, that they fell weeping at His feet, only to hear Him say, "Thy sins are forgiven . . . thy faith hath saved thee" (Luke vii. 48, 50). And He published it abroad, as the justification of all His manner of life, "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (xix. 10). Even as to the disciples at last, expressing again in one word the whole meaning of His redeeming grace, and anticipating the great reconciliation of the Cross, He said, "I am the Way"—the way by which guilty, estranged, polluted sinners may come home to God.

And now that Cross stands evermore on the conspicuous Golgotha of the world's history, the meeting-place between God and man; the place where deepest stains are washed away, where broken hearts are healed, where despairing ones find newness of hope, God's plenteous lovingkindness, and the pledge of everlasting life. "Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holy place by the blood of Jesus, by the way which He dedicated for us, a new and living way, through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having a great Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in fulness of faith" (Heb. x. 19-22).

Once more, Jesus Christ is our Friend.

It is natural to the heart of man to hunger for love. We are full of longings that can find rest only in fellowship and affection. Our souls are not self-sufficing or self-satisfying. We need one another, and this not merely in the sense that we need one another's help: we need the revelation of heart to heart, the converse of soul with soul. But, having intercourse with one another, we still crave for deeper, tenderer, more intimate fellowship. And even when we have found our nearest and most confidential friendships, we crave for yet fuller satisfaction than the heart can find in the best and truest human friendships and affections—even for the friendship of the Infinite, for fellowship with God.

This Divine satisfaction Jesus brings to men. He came to woo them, and to win them. It was this yearning affection for the people that commended the grace of God to their hearts. And in proportion as they were receptive of His love, He loved them with a love ever fuller and more intimate. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus" (John xi. 5); "the disciple whom Jesus loved" (xxi. 20): so intensely did His heart's affection concentrate itself on those that were able to receive it. And the great assurance to which all His teaching and all His saving grace led the way, and which He bequeathed to the disciples as their precious possession for ever, was the word uttered forth on that ever to be remembered last night, in the Upper Room, "Ye are My friends." Was it not also in reference to this same making known of His uttermost love, a love sealed in sacrificial death, but triumphing over sin and death, that He said, "I am the Life"?

II.

This triple need is fulfilled in Jesus Christ, afore-time, now, and evermore.

He was Teacher, Saviour, Friend—yesterday.

From of old, He was "the true Light, even the Light which lighteth every man" (John i. 9). And where His light illumined the mind, His love sought the heart's trust, that He might lift men above the guilt and corruption of sin into the life of humble and holy fellowship with God. So was it in the earliest times, and in patriarchal history, and among the people of Israel, and among the Gentiles. "Before Abraham was born, I AM," He said; and through all the world's yesterday He was the Revealer, the Redeemer, the Restorer—revealing the truth of God, redeeming men from sin to the favour of God, and restoring them to God's fellowship.

So is it in this great to-day of the Son of Man.

For the things that are recorded in the Gospels were but the things "that Jesus began both to do and to teach" (Acts i. 1); and He is still continuing His gracious, present-day ministry.

He is at once the patient Instructor of souls, leading and guiding His own chosen ones; the Revealer of truth to His Church; and, beyond these boundaries, the Imparter of manifold wisdom to the world, even to the world that knows Him not. Thus the great world for which He lived and died is not left to itself, nor even to the testimony of His witnesses: He Himself bears testimony, by His Spirit (John xv. 26, 27), and, testifying variously concerning righteousness, seeks to lead men into some measure of faith, however undefined, in His essential redemption, and into some fellowship, however indeterminate, with His true love. But more

especially to the accompaniment of His express Gospel, and among those who are truly named by His Name, does He put forth His power to save, and make manifest His wondrous love. And individually, in our prayer, in our pondering of His Word, and in the multitude of our thoughts within us, He fulfils His promise, "My grace is sufficient for thee"; and, as the Friend of friends, He says, "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee." To-day He is Teacher, Saviour, Friend.

And He will be the same for ever.

Beyond these changeful fortunes of the world, and beyond the watching and warfare of the saints, looms the mystery of the hereafter. The world must roll on its way towards its destiny; and for each one of us there remains at last, when these mortal years are ended, "the long way that I must take alone." But just as, through all the years, His faithful love abates not, and His tender ministrations do not fail, so shall we find Him at our side when we step forth into the unknown. He will hold our right hand, saying, "Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name, thou art Mine." So, when life's journeying shall have come to its final close, and that passing of the river, in His companionship, shall be accomplished like some swift and happy dream, we shall find ourselves "at home with the Lord."

Even then, in the for ever, He shall be Teacher, Saviour, Friend. For He opens the seven-sealed book of human mystery (Rev. v. 1), and fulfils the promise with which, while that mystery pressed upon us, we have had to be contented here: "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter." The new song, which His redeemed ones sing, thrills ever with new wonder and delight, as

there grows upon them the meaning of their redemption unto God by His blood (v. 9). And their hearts are for ever satisfied, as the King makes them sharers of His dearest love, and guides them unto fountains of waters of life (vii. 15, 17).

Let this, therefore, remain with us as our heart's true watchword, while, as pilgrims of the night, we yet have our faces towards the day-dawn, and are ever "seeking a country." For whether we look back along the changeful years, and the fleeting generations, of the past; or look forward to the unknown to-morrow, and all the mystery of the hidden future: we have learned one secret, which charms away our fears, and evermore allures our longing faith, as we say to ourselves, and testify to others, that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and to-day, yea and for ever."

Me for Thine own Thou lov'st to take,
In time and in eternity;
Thou never, never wilt forsake
A helpless soul that trusts in Thee.

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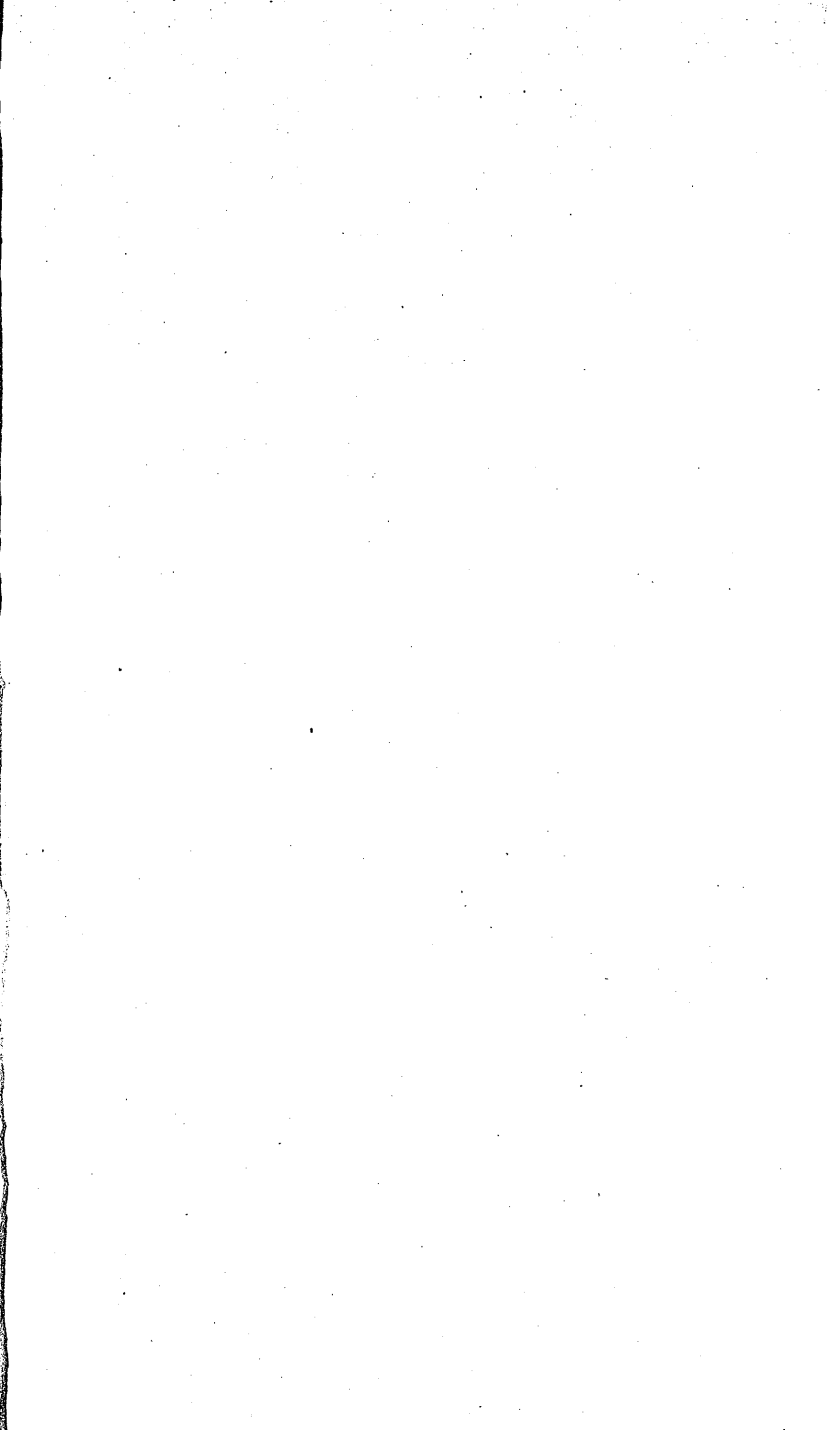
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